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# DELHI

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## A HISTORICAL SKETCH

BY

PERCIVAL SPEAR, PH.D.

AUTHOR OF *The Nabobs*



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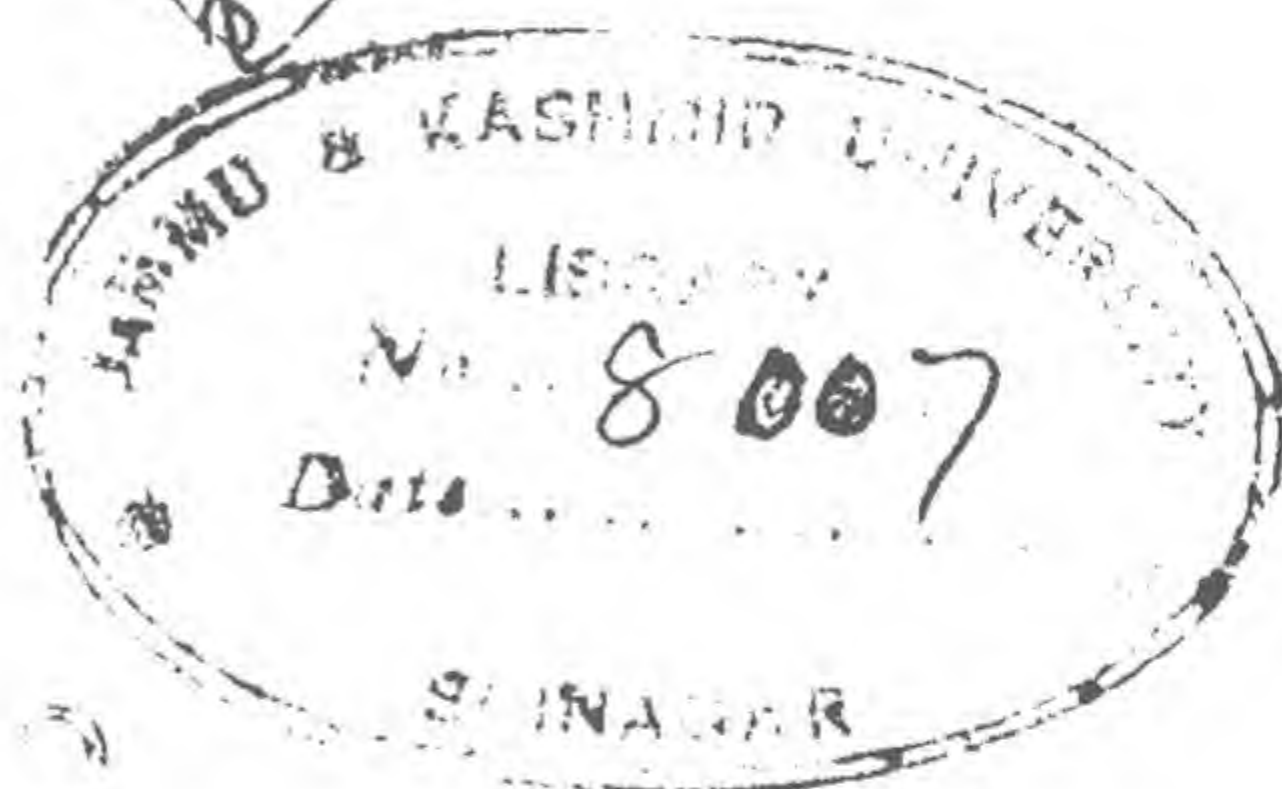
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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION ... ..	1
II. HINDU DELHI ... ..	7
III. <u>THE DELHI SULTANATE, 1191-1398</u> ...	12
IV. THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY ... ..	39
V. THE MOGUL EMPIRE ... ..	44
VI. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ... ..	60
VII. THE TWILIGHT OF THE MOGULS ...	79
VIII. THE MUTINY IN DELHI ... ..	86
IX. MODERN DELHI ... ..	94
INDEX ... ..	101

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
I. BACK VIEW OF QUTB MOSQUE AND IRON PILLAR      ...      ...      ...	8
II. SURAJ KUND (a) GENERAL VIEW, AND (b) THE TEMPLE STEPS	9
III. QUWWAT-UL-ISLAM MOSQUE (a) HINDU, AND (b) MUSLIM, DECORATIVE WORK	24
IV. BIJAY MANDAL      ...      ...      ...	25
V. MOTH-KI-MASJID      ...      ...      ...	56
VI. JHAROKA, DELHI FORT      ...      ...	57
VII. SAHDAR JUNG'S TOMB      ...      ...	72
VIII. ST JAMES'S CHURCH      ...      ...	73

# I

## INTRODUCTION

DELHI can point to a history as chequered and more ancient than the 'eternal' city of Rome; it was a famous capital before the days of Alexander, and has survived all the vicissitudes of time and fortune to become one of the youngest and certainly the most magnificent of recent imperial cities. For it has undergone transformations as numerous as the incarnations of the God Vishnu; if it has frequently changed its site, its character and even its name, it has preserved through all a continuous thread of existence. Like most ancient cities it has succumbed to the magic of the number seven, but as the plain of Delhi is too flat for even the most exuberant imagination to discover seven hills on which the city can rest, historians have played with the idea of seven consecutive cities. The 'seven cities' of Delhi are in fact a no more accurate description of Delhi



history than the seven hills ascribed to many other places; there have been three main centres of population and some fourteen distinct cities. Delhi owes its long history and its continuous importance not to the whims of kings, nor to its beauty or strength, nor to the necessity of completing the number seven, but to its own intrinsic practical qualities.

If a physical map of India be examined it will be seen that Delhi stands at the end of a corridor which runs from the north-west passes and the Indus valley, between the Himalayan range and the Rajputana desert. When this corridor reaches the Jumna valley it opens into the great Gangetic plain towards the east, and the wide expanse of Central India to the south. From here the traveller or the conqueror may proceed without a check to the Bay of Bengal, or may turn south to the Deccan, Maharashtra or fertile Gujarat. Strategically Delhi is the point which commands roads to all parts of India; economically it is a distributing centre for the incoming merchandise from the north-west. This is still illustrated today by the importance of Delhi as a railway centre.

## INTRODUCTION

It may then be asked, Why was the particular situation of Delhi chosen and maintained throughout the centuries? Why not Agra at the southern end of the southward running stretch of the Jumna, or Karnal at the northern end? Agra was, it is true, the imperial capital for a time, but it was not maintained, first because it was shut out of the direct line of communication with the ever important Panjab by the curve of the Rajputana desert, and secondly because it is distinctly hotter and less healthy than Delhi. The northern end of the line surpassed Delhi in both these respects, but it never found favour on account of its distance from Rajputana. Delhi, in touch with north, east and west, was also the nearest point for watching the Rajput strongholds. Jaipur is only 150 miles distant, and Ajmer, the strategic key of Rajputana, 225 miles. On the whole Delhi was the most central of the possible solutions along the line of the Jumna, and it has always remained the centre of the ruling power of Northern India.

A further question which must rise to the mind of any visitor to, or student of, Delhi



concerns the numerous changes of site to which the city has been subject. The reason is not principally physical, for though the Jumna changes its course from time to time it has not been enough to endanger the city. Many of the cities, in fact, have not even been built on the river bank. The determining causes of the frequent changes have been strategy, prestige and health. Some sites, like those of Suraj Kund, Tughlakabad and the Qutb were clearly chosen, in spite of disadvantages such as heat and lack of water, for their military strength. In disturbed times like those of Rajput India and the age of the Mongol invasions, the strongest natural site was chosen. But a much more potent cause of new cities was the dynastic pride of conquerors and individual kings. The founding of a new city has been a traditional way of earning political immortality, of celebrating the rise of a new dynasty, or of crowning the glory of an individual monarch. So we find that Ala-ad-din, Ghiyas-ad-din Tughlak, Humayun and Sher Shah all celebrated the rise of their dynasties by commencing new cities, while rulers of established dynasties

## INTRODUCTION

like Mohammed Tughlak, Firoz Shah and Shah Jahan have similarly proclaimed their own magnificence. One more factor, that of health, helped to determine the *position* of the new city, once pride or policy had determined its construction. It will be noticed that most of the cities, in chronological order, tend to move from south to north. This was because the cooler breezes blow from the mountains, and each king as he started his city wished to avoid the buildings of his predecessors which might obstruct or heat the breezes. So we find that the successive extensions of the Qutb site were northwards, that Firoz Shah's and Humayun's cities were north of this, and Shahjahanabad beyond them again. When this rule was not followed it was either because the new site was completely detached from any earlier city, as in the case of Tughlakabad, or because the previous city was already in ruins as in the case of Humayun's city and Firozabad.

Many of the separate cities adjoined existing ones, and were in fact only extensions of them, but we can distinguish in general two main centres of population: one is the Qutb



## DELHI

site, the capital of the Delhi Sultanate for three hundred years, and the other the area from Kashmir Gate in the north to Humayun's tomb in the south, the most ancient and the most modern of inhabited Delhis. Within this area the heroes of the *Mahabharata* held their court, Firoz Shah erected Asoka's pillar, the Mogul emperors reached the zenith of their power and magnificence, declined and fell, and the British have erected the most imposing monument of their power.

## II

### HINDU DELHI

THE earliest knowledge we have of Delhi is of the epic period of Hindu India, and our source is the *Mahabharata*. Modern scholars have surmised that Delhi may be older still and even reach back to the days of the Indus Valley civilization. Traces of this culture have been discovered at Rupar on the Sutlej, and the mound of the Purana Qila suggests both a favourable site for settlement, and the possible accumulation of the debris of centuries. It is to be hoped that the archæologist's spade will soon penetrate the secrets of the Purana Qila and perhaps add another long chapter to the history of Delhi.

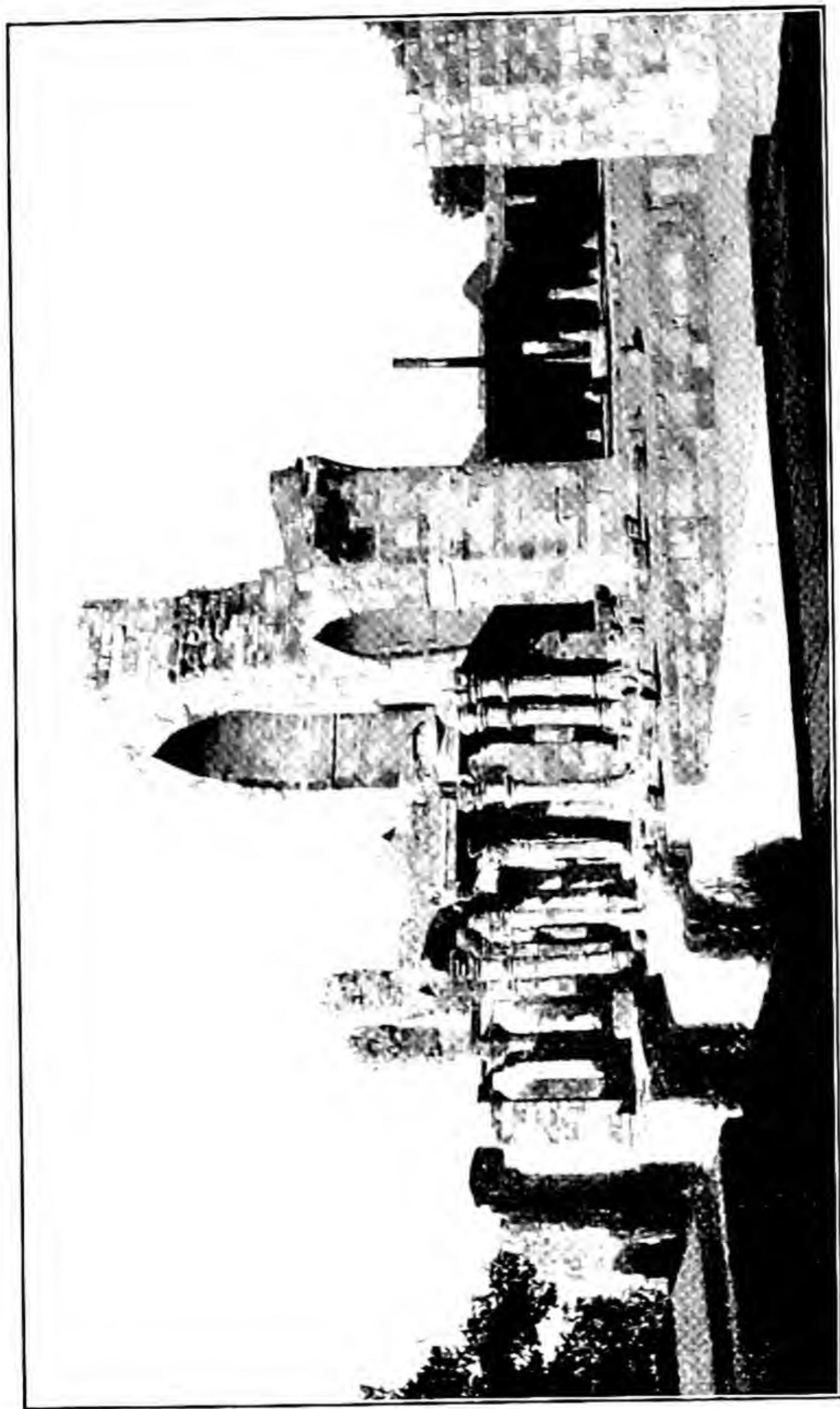
In the epic days of the *Mahabharata* the capital of the Pandavas was Indraprastha. There is no direct evidence to connect Indraprastha with Delhi, but a good deal of circumstantial probability. Indraprastha was one of five 'pats' or 'extended places' about

## DELHI

which the Kuru war was fought. The sites of all the others—Panipat, Sonapat, Baghpat, and Tilpat—are known, and Delhi would make a natural and suitable site for the fifth city. The traditional site is that now occupied by the Purana Qila,<sup>1</sup> and the space between it and Humayun's tomb. The fact that there are no visible remains of the city does not lessen the probability, for the palaces and buildings of those days were of wood, and could not have survived the ravages of time and war. Even in the cities of Asoka's time only the principal buildings were of stone. We may therefore picture the Pandava brothers holding their court in their palaces on the mound of the Purana Qila and the animated scenes of arriving caravans, noblemen and war chariots on the plain between the Purana Qila and the War Memorial Arch.

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally the city included the Nigambodh Ghat (near the Salimgarh) and the Nilichatri temple, and extended as far as the Dariba in the heart of the present city. No critical edition of the *Mahabharata* has yet been published and we are therefore at liberty to speculate on the possibility that this epic may contain a reminiscence of the clash of the Indo-Aryan and Indus Valley civilizations.

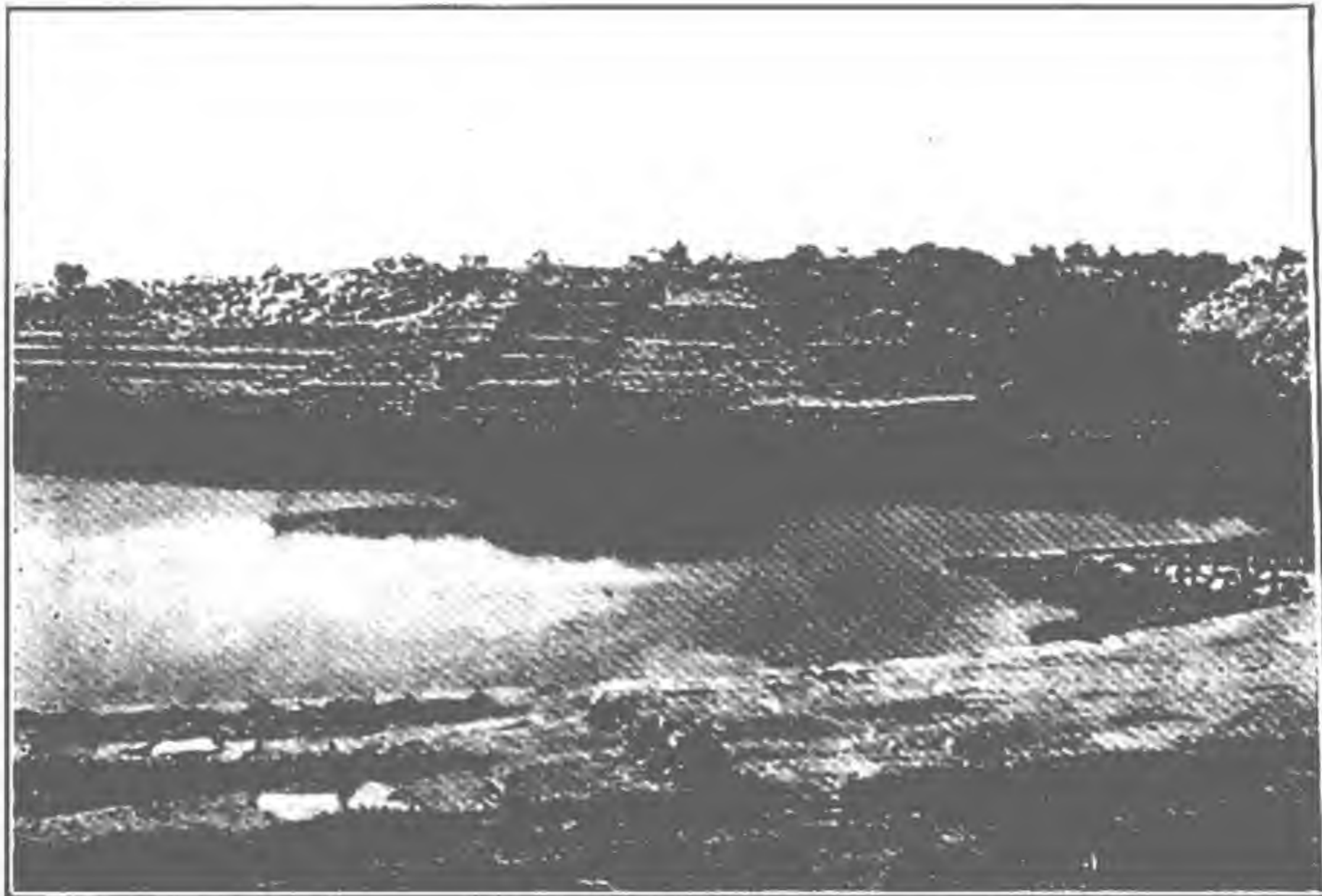




BACK VIEW OF QUTB MOSQUE AND IRON PILLAR



(a)



(b)

**SURAJ KUND**

(a) General View, and (b) The Temple Steps

## HINDU DELHI

From this time little is known of Delhi for some centuries. It was at any rate no more than a provincial city under the Mauryas and succeeding dynasties. Remains of the Gupta period have been discovered on the Purana Qila site of the fourth century A.D., and to the same period belongs the Iron Pillar, now at the Qutb, which records the victories of 'Chandra', believed to be the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II, who took the title of Vikramaditya.<sup>1</sup> In the Rajput medieval period which succeeded the empire of Harsha there is no definite trace of the existence of Delhi and it probably continued to be a provincial or local capital perhaps on different sites. The next definite trace of Delhi is on a different site—Suraj Kund—some three miles from Tughlakabad at the opening of a small rocky valley leading to Anandpur. The great tank contains the lower courses of one of the few temples to Surya in India, and nearby are the remains of a city. The water problem was evidently solved by the *bund* which shut

<sup>1</sup> This pillar was probably moved to Delhi in 1052 when the Qutb site was repeopled by a Tumar prince. Chandragupta succeeded his father in A.D. 380. See E. B. Havell, *The History of Aryan Rule in India*, p. 164.



## DELHI

off the head of the valley and converted the basin in the hills beyond into a lake. Anang Pal, a Tumar Rajput, was the founder of this city about A.D. 1020 and has left his name in the village of Anandpur in the centre of this basin. We do not know the reason for the selection of this barren and rocky site, but the most probable one would seem to be that of defence, and it suggests a general state of insecurity caused by the wars of the Rajput chiefs, and particularly the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni. A few years later the city was moved to the Qutb site, where the citadel was known as the Lal Kot, whose walls may be traced to this day. About 1150 the Tumars were displaced by the Chauhan Rajputs of Ajmer. Vigraharaja<sup>1</sup> was the conqueror, and his nephew, the famous Prithvi Raj of Hindu legend. Delhi was now an outlying city of the Chauhan kingdom, and though it had 27 temples its provincial character is revealed by a comparison with the contemporary architecture of Rajputana. The temples of Delhi, beautiful as the surviving fragments are, were but a pale copy of the

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Shorter History of India*, pp. 35, 36.

## HINDU DELHI

developed style of Rajputana and Gujarat, which can be seen at its best in the Jain temples of Mount Abu.

With the reign of Prithvi Raj Delhi emerges from the realms of archæology and legend into that of recorded history. His victories and his magnificence, like those of King Arthur, are the subject of an endless folk-lore, but they proved, as in the cases of Rana Sanga of Mewar and Raja Ram of Vijayanagar, to be but the prelude of a final catastrophe. The death of Prithvi Raj at Thaneswar in 1191, opposing the advance of Mohammed of Ghor, led directly to the capture of Delhi and the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate. Delhi lost its temples and its fighting raja, and became instead the capital of Muslim India. The defeat of Prithvi Raj, which had such momentous consequences, was caused by the factors which appear again and again in the history of Delhi as well as of India—antiquated methods of warfare and internal dissensions.



### III

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

### 1191-1398

WITH the appearance of Mohammed Ghori, Delhi underwent a radical change. It was no longer a provincial city or small state capital, the headquarters of a Rajput clan, but the administrative centre of a great empire. The era of great empires which had ended with Harsha, had begun once more. In this period however it was not so much the capital *of* India, as the capital of the Turkish and Mohammedan power *in* India. It was really the headquarters of an army of occupation, constantly engaged in war on two fronts, and the Hindus were frankly a subject people. First a continuous offensive was waged against the Rajputs and other Hindu states, until the Rajputs were defeated and the south as far as Madura conquered by Ala-ad-din. Second there was a defensive campaign against the Mongols who constantly menaced

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

the peace of India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Less than a generation after the capture of Delhi, the Kharismian empire of Persia was overthrown by the great Chinghiz Khan and the last Kharismian army was scattered on the banks of the Indus. The terror of the Mongols was so great that this period is still referred to in Persia simply as 'the bad time' and the alarm in India was proportionate. Those stern fighting kings, the Slaves, the Khiljis and the Tughlaks, the hammers of the Hindus and the guardians of the gate, achieved one great service and bequeathed one great evil to India—the saving of India from Mongol devastation and the estrangement of Hindus and Muslims.

Sultan Mohammed soon retired to Ghor leaving as his Viceroy Qutb-ad-din Aibek, who in 1206 proclaimed himself independent and became the first Sultan of Delhi. He is the real founder of the Delhi empire. Though busy in extending his rule Qutb-ad-din found time to embellish his capital and leave an indelible mark on the history of Delhi. He retained the old site but extended it beyond the limits of the old Lal Kot. He



## DELHI

built the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque out of the materials of 27 temples and commenced the Qutb Minar, probably as a tower of victory on the model of a still visible similar one at Ghazni.<sup>1</sup> These buildings symbolize and illustrate not only the Islamic political supremacy, but the clash of cultures which was already beginning. The visitor to the Qutb Mosque may observe Hindu temple pillars with bell ornaments and other decorations intact, but with the human faces disfigured; he may mark the introduction of pointed arches on the Persian model, constructed by Hindu workmen who did not yet know the principle of the keystone; and he may see the new Arabic script on the pillars of these arches almost smothered in a mass of naturalistic carving executed by these same Hindu workmen. A generation later the keystone has come into use, and the naturalistic carving has been displaced by formal geometrical designs imported from Iraq and Persia.

<sup>1</sup> For another view see R. S. Kanwar Sen's article in the *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, Vol. III, Part II, No. 6, December 1934.

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

Qutb-ad-din was succeeded by Altamsh, a stern soldier who pursued the double policy with unbending rigour. Altamsh added a new quarter to Delhi, sometimes dignified by the title of a new city, by building on the south-east side of the Lal Kot. Foundations of houses and the ruins of mosques still witness to this suburb. In the old city he tripled the size of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque by adding three more great arches on either side, and enclosing the space thus formed. Other buildings were his own tomb at one corner of the new mosque, magnificently decorated with the newly imported geometrical designs, and the tomb of his son, Nasir-ad-din Mahmud Shah, known locally as Sultan Ghari (The Underground Sultan). This is to be found in the rocky plain some two miles to the west of the Qutb, and, built before the death of Altamsh himself, is the earliest known Muslim tomb in India.

Before his death, Altamsh, dissatisfied with all his surviving sons, nominated his daughter, Raziya as queen. The only queen of the Delhi Empire, she had a troubled reign of four years, which ended in her death in 1240.



## DELHI

Like Matilda of England, all her high spirit could not overcome the turbulence of the times and the ancient prejudice against the rule of a woman.<sup>1</sup>

The Slave Kings—so called because they sprang from the royal bodyguard which was recruited in childhood in the same way as the famous Turkish Janissaries—came to an end in 1290, when the profligate Kaiqabad was replaced by Jalal-ad-din Firoz Khilji. This benevolent ruler was murdered by his ambitious nephew, Ala-ad-din Khilji, in 1296. No excuse can be offered for this action save that of necessity; the empire urgently needed strong leadership against the Mongol menace and, as in the case of contemporary Plantagenet England, no ruler could afford to imprison a defeated rival for long.

The reign of Ala-ad-din marks the peak of the Delhi Sultanate and is an epoch in the history of the city. Ala-ad-din first dealt with the Mongol menace and checked their

<sup>1</sup> Accessible accounts of her reign may be found in Lane Poole's *Mediæval India* and in the *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III. Her tomb, a plain rough grave, is to be found just inside the Turkoman Gate of Delhi City, close to Holy Trinity Church.

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

incessant frontier raids. In Delhi itself the Mongol colony which had grown up during the previous century was massacred, and the heads of the victims were displayed upon pikes fixed in a tower outside the city. It is possible that the Chor Minar, a half ruined tower to the left of the Delhi-Qutb road, about two miles from the Qutb, is the tower of this tragedy. The frontier secured, Ala-ad-din turned to the Rajputs and captured Ranthambor and Chitor after celebrated sieges. He then invaded the south and penetrated to Madura in a series of victorious campaigns. Southern treasure<sup>1</sup> was now added to Mongol heads and Rajput blood as the trophies of war. Delhi, which under the Slave kings had been more of a fortified Turkish camp than a capital, now became the effective metropolis of India. Merchants jostled with soldiers in the streets and artists and poets appeared at the court. It was the age of Hazrat Amir Khasrau the poet and of the saint Nizam-ad-din.

<sup>1</sup> Some gold coins of this period were recently discovered in excavating the treasure chamber of Mohammed Tughlak at the Bijay Mandal.



## DELHI

The new glory of the empire was reflected by Ala-ad-din's building activities. First must be noticed the new suburb or city of Siri, about two miles north of Lal Kot, parts of the walls of which are still standing. It is only about a mile in circuit, and seems to have been built to contain and protect Ala-ad-din's new palace, the famous Hall of a Thousand Pillars. The fortifications illustrate the sense of insecurity produced by the Mongol forays. Nothing of the palace, not even its site, is now known, and this site as a whole still awaits the excavator's spade. The second great work of Ala-ad-din was the great tank or Hauz Khas excavated just beyond the limits of the then existing city. The third was the enlargement of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque. The area of the mosque was more than doubled; six arches were added at the northern end of Altamsh's extension and there was to be a new minar, twice as high as the existing one. Unfortunately the king did not live to complete his work. The area was enclosed and one magnificent gateway, the Alai Darwaza, was completed, but the arches were hardly begun and the tower

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

had risen but fifty feet before his death. There the rubble core stands today in the midst of flowers, a melancholy symbol of great designs frustrated by death.

Ala-ad-din left no worthy successor. Intrigue and degeneracy culminated in the reign of the 'sweeper king', Khasrau Khan, which provoked a military revolt led by the governor, Ghiyas-ad-din Tughlak, and ushered in the Tughlak dynasty in 1321. The Tughlak period is essentially a continuation of the previous age, only with increasing difficulties and reduced resources. It is a soldiers' age, stern and pitiless, and its spirit is reflected in its buildings, the unique and grim Tughlak style. Sloping walls of massive strength, plain undecorated surfaces in place of the rich ornamentation of the Khiljis, rough hewn stone for red ashlar are the marks of this style.

Ghiyas-ad-din's brief but creative reign was filled by his efforts to restore order in the empire after four years of anarchy. Revolts in the south and east and a revived Mongol menace all threatened the new Sultan's power, and the revived insecurity of the reign is



## DELHI

shown in the capital. Ghiyas-ad-din's great work in Delhi was the building of a new city—Tughlakabad. It lay five miles to the east of the old city; in a highly defensible position on the edge of the rocky outcrop of hills which stretches from Badarpur to Faridabad. The motives for building this city were both dynastic pride and defence. Ghiyas was the soldier-founder of a new dynasty, and the Mongol menace was once more pressing. The first explains the fact of the new city, the second its site and its nature. The mighty sloping walls of the city, culminating in the citadel, still frown down on the Qutb-Badarpur road and bring to mind thoughts of Egyptian monuments and Greek cyclopean walls.

Wondrous is this wall—stone,  
fates have broken it,  
have burst the stronghold,  
roofs are fallen,  
towers tottering,  
hoar gate-towers despoiled,  
shattered the battlements,  
riven, fallen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'The Ruin', quoted by H. O. Taylor in *The Mediaeval Mind*, Vol. I, p. 143 (Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1911).

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

Today it lies hot, stony and deserted. What was the fate which overtook it? The city was in fact never fully populated, and was abandoned within fifteen years of its commencement. Legend ascribes this to the potent curses of the saint Nizam-ad-din, who having been hindered by the Sultan in the erection of his tank near Humayun's tomb, pronounced that the city should be inhabited by none but Gujars and jackals. Ghiyas-ad-din marched back from Bengal, breathing vengeance on the saint, but at Afghanpur, where his son Mohammed Tughlak went out to meet him, he was crushed beneath a pavilion which had been erected for his reception. The saint has been suspected of collusion with Mohammed in the matter; certainly both of them benefited by the accident, for Mohammed Tughlak gained the throne, and the saint died soon afterwards in the odour of sanctity.<sup>1</sup> But there were other reasons for the city's quick decay. The water of the district is brackish, and the problem was probably not fully solved by the construction of a tank in a bay of the city.

<sup>1</sup> See *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, p. 134.



## DELHI

(now the flat fertile space between the Qutb-Badarpur Road and the city wall). Further, the city must have been extremely oppressive in the hot weather, so that when the Mongol pressure lessened once more, and the sense of general security revived, there would be no good reason for maintaining it. The final cause of its abandonment was the whim of Mohammed Tughlak. Mohammed Tughlak has thus been described by Ibn Batuta : <sup>1</sup>

This king is of all men the fondest of making gifts and shedding blood. His gate is never without some poor man enriched or some living man executed, and stories are current amongst the people of his generosity and courage and of his cruelty and violence towards criminals. For all that, he is of all men the most humble and the readiest to show equity and justice. The ceremonies of religion are strictly complied with at his court, and he is severe in the matter of attendance at prayer and in punishing those who neglect it. He is one of those kings whose felicity is unimpaired and surpassing all ordinary experience, but his dominant quality is generosity.

This brilliant and eccentric monarch soon tired of the grim security of Tughlakabad.

<sup>1</sup> *Selections from the Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated and edited by H. A. R. Gibb, p. 197 (George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1929).

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

In 1327 he abandoned Tughlakabad and transferred the capital to Daulatabad, seven hundred miles away in the Deccan. In view of Ala-ad-din's vast southern conquests this was a more central situation, but it neglected nevertheless the essential fact that the strength of the empire and its most potent dangers both lay in the north.

The perennial difficulty of the Indian empire was in fact making itself felt; before the age of steam distances were too great and movement too slow to enable a single ruler to control the whole of India for long. After a few troubled years Mohammed Tughlak returned to Delhi again.

The inhabitants of Delhi disliked the change which ruined their trade by the withdrawal of the court, and on the occasion of a royal visit two years later, they vented their spleen by throwing anonymous and abusive letters into the Durbar Hall. The king was enraged and ordered the whole population to remove to Daulatabad as a penal measure. Many died on the way. It is said that on a search being made, one old man was discovered in Delhi; he was tied to a cart's tail and



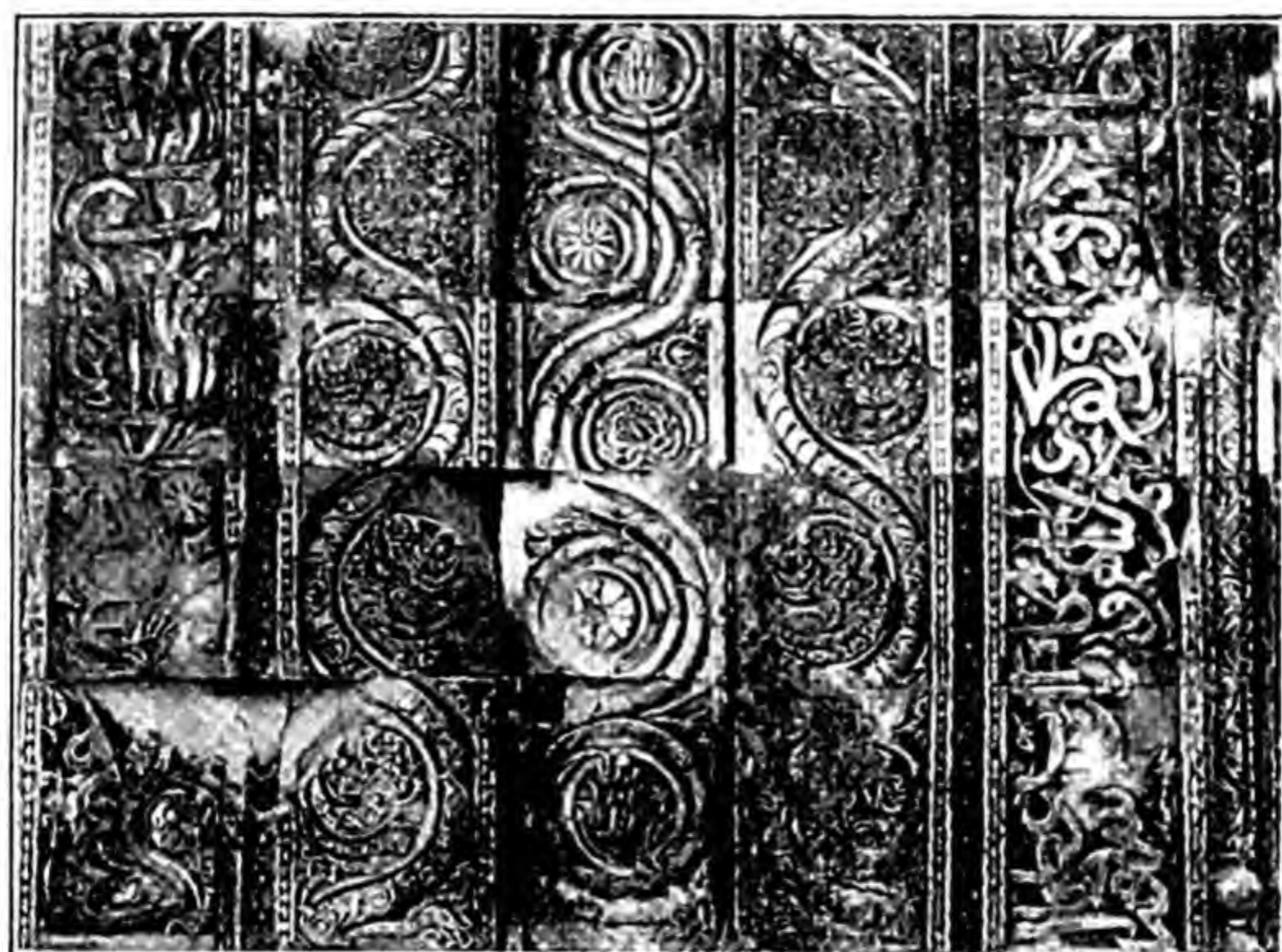
## DELHI

dragged to Daulatabad. Only one foot arrived. Mohammed Tughlak returned to Delhi from Daulatabad about 1334 but shortly afterwards, in 1336, a second exodus was ordered to Sargadwari, near the ancient Khor on the Ganges. This time the intention was benevolent—to rescue the stricken inhabitants of Delhi from famine and plant them in a flourishing and prosperous territory. Here the king built first a city of booths, and then more permanent buildings, and the provisioning of the city was arranged by Ain-ul-Mulk, the model governor of Oudh. There for six years the king had his headquarters until the model governor rebelled under threat of transfer to the Deccan, and the new city broke up in the stress of the subsequent fighting. The remaining few years of his life were spent by this stormy king in fighting rebellion, so that his only permanent memorial is, in spite of all, to be found in Delhi, the object of his alternate love and hate.<sup>1</sup>

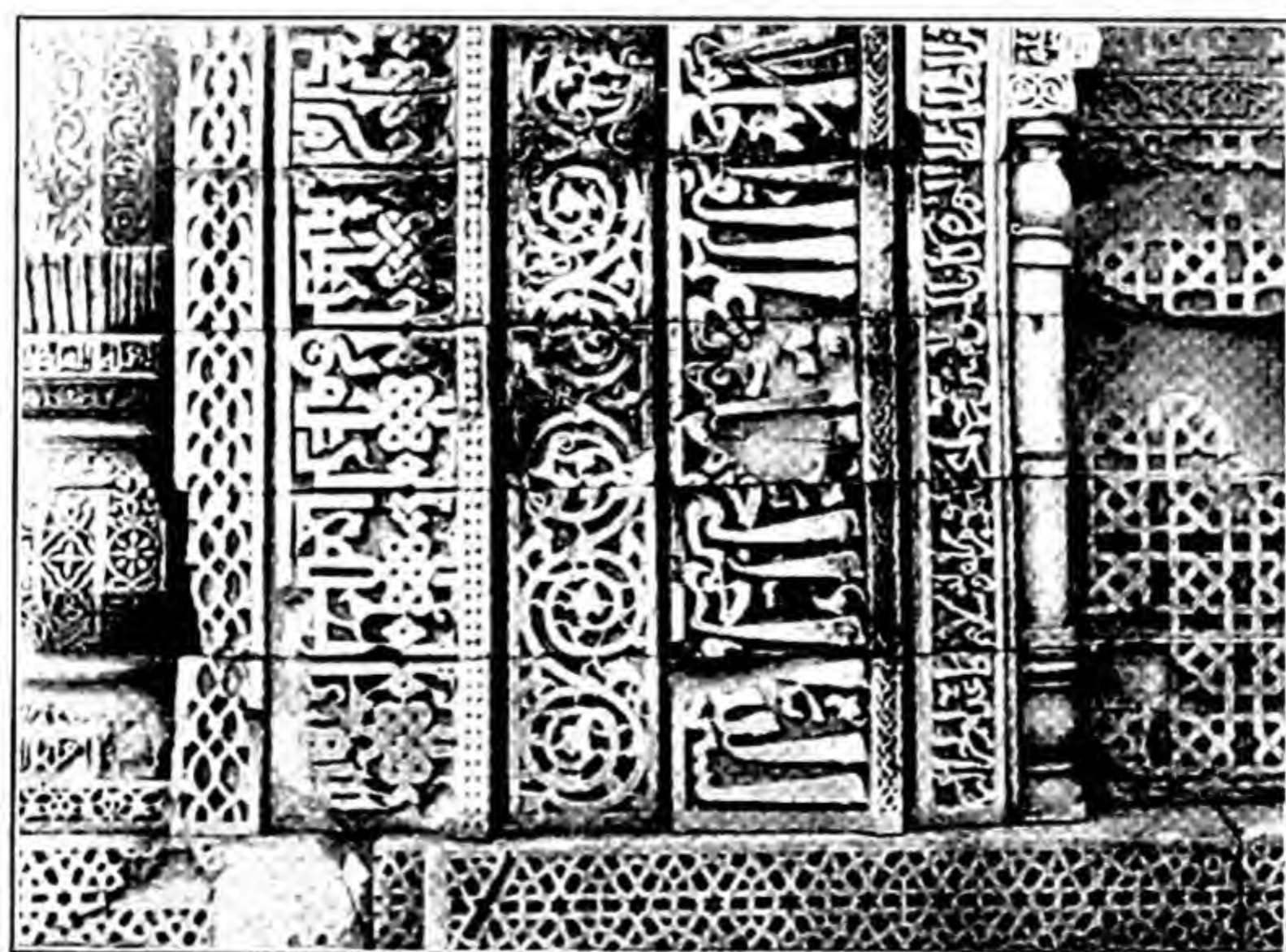
On his return from Daulatabad about 1334 the Sultan had begun to enlarge the city. The large space between the Qutb and Siri,

<sup>1</sup> See *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, pp. 135–72.





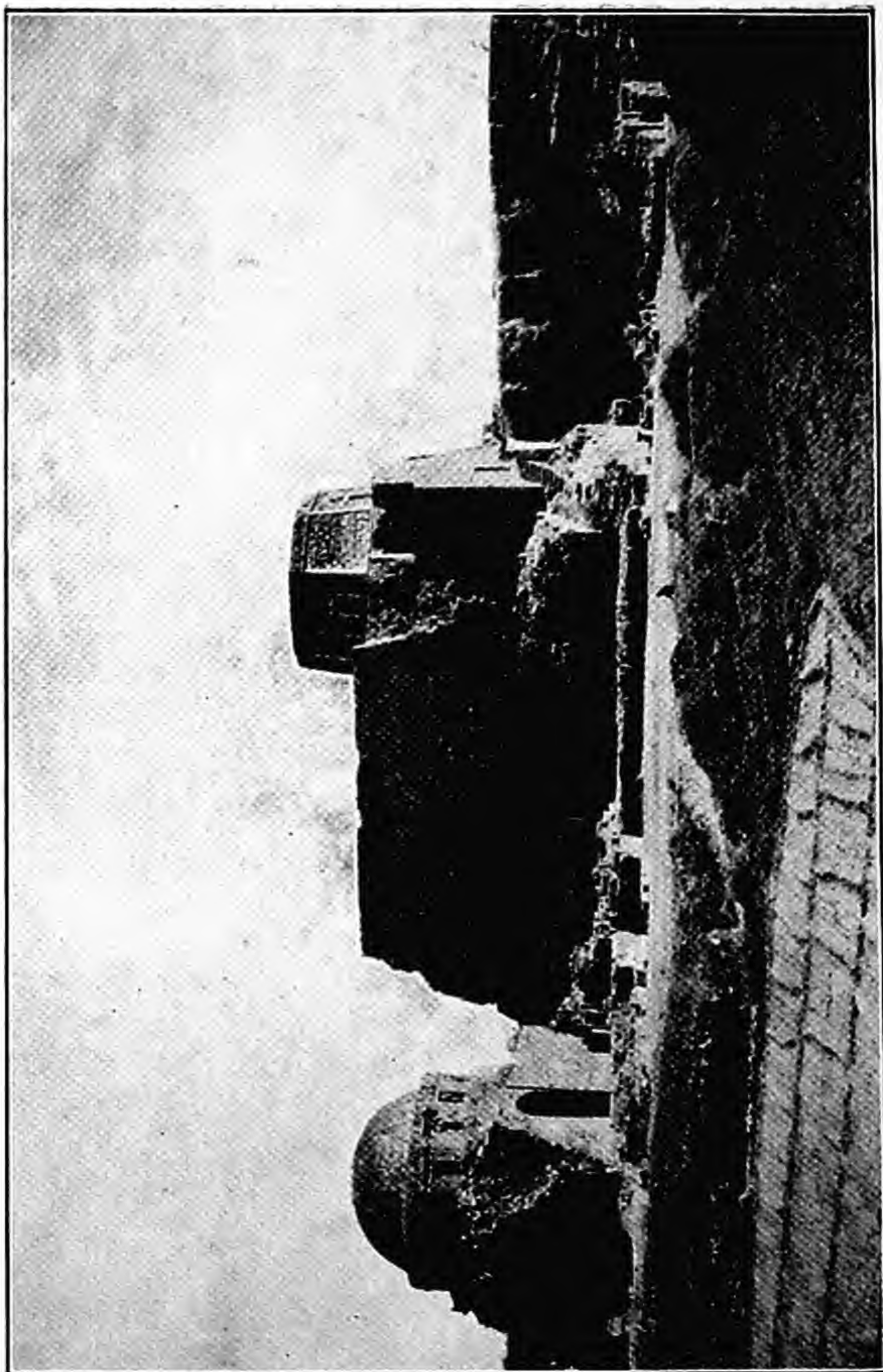
(a)



(b)

QUWWAT-UL-ISLAM MOSQUE  
 (a) Hindu, and (b) Muslim, Decorative Work





BIJAY MANDAL

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

no doubt already covered by suburbs, was walled in and named Jahanpannah (the Refuge of the World) and in the centre was built a new royal palace and mosque. The mosque which has recently been cleared of villages and cleaned is of noble proportions, but in the severe style typical of the Tughlaks. Close to it lie the remains of the royal palace, now called the Bijay Mandal. This site too has been cleared and the original Hall of Public Audience—at first mistaken for Ala-ad-din's Hall of a Thousand Pillars—the Hall of Private Audience, and some of the private apartments can now be traced.<sup>1</sup> On the tower was a pavilion from which the Sultan reviewed his troops. Here Ibn Batuta attended the king during his stay in Delhi. The eastern wall of Jahanpannah can still be traced, and between it and Tughlakabad lay a lake, the sluice gates to regulate which can still be seen. The city of Delhi now stretched

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<sup>1</sup> The treasure chambers excavated in 1931 yielded gold coins from South India of Ala-ad-din's time—the first South Indian coins found in Northern India. The foundations of the royal baths and zenana can be seen on the west side of the main building and the elephant track to the Private Audience Hall can be traced on the north.



## DELHI

from the Qutb mound for about three miles to the north, consisting of three parts, the Lal Kot, Jahanpannah and Siri. On the western side lay the great pleasure tank of the Hauz Khas, on the east a lake covered the plain between Jahanpannah and Tughlakabad. To the south lay the stretch of rocky country which the nobles must have frequented for sport, while to the north stretched a fertile plain no doubt covered with the gardens and country houses of the nobles. Everywhere domes rose white to the sky, water sparkled in the sun and the streets were gay with the bustle and colour of metropolitan life. In spite of its tribulations Delhi had never before been so large and magnificent. Ibn Batuta who lived in Delhi from 1334-42, thus describes the city as he found it.<sup>1</sup>

On the next day we arrived at the city of Dihli (Delhi), the metropolis of India, a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength. It is surrounded by a wall that has no equal in the world, and is the largest city in the entire Muslim Orient.

The city of Delhi is made up now of four neighbouring and contiguous towns. One of them is Delhi

<sup>1</sup> Gibb, *op cit.*, pp. 194-6.



## THE DELHI SULTANATE

proper, the old city built by the infidels and captured in the year 1188. The second is called Siri, known also as the Abode of the Caliphate; this was the town given by the Sultan to Ghiyath-ad-Din, the grandson of the 'Abbasid Caliph Mustansir, when he came to his court. The third is called Tughlaq Abad, after its founder, the Sultan Tughlaq, the father of the Sultan of India to whose court we came. The reason why he built it was that one day he said to a former Sultan, 'O master of the world, it were fitting that a city should be built here'. The Sultan replied to him in jest, 'When you are Sultan, build it'. It came about by the decree of God that he became Sultan, so he built it and called it by his own name. The fourth is called Jahan Panah, and is set apart for the residence of the reigning Sultan, Muhammad Shah. He was the founder of it, and it was his intention to unite these four towns within a single wall, but after building part of it he gave up the rest because of the expense required for its construction.

The cathedral mosque occupies a large area; its walls, roof, and paving are all constructed of white stones, admirably squared and firmly cemented with lead. There is no wood in it at all. It has thirteen domes of stone, . . . and it has four courts. In the centre of the mosque is an awe-inspiring column, and nobody knows of what metal it is constructed. One of their learned men told me that it is called *Haft Jush*, which means 'seven metals', and that it is constructed from these seven. A part of this column, of finger's breadth, has been

## DELHI

polished, and gives out a brilliant gleam. Iron makes no impression on it. It is thirty cubits high, and we rolled a turban round it, and the portion which encircled it measured eight cubits. At the eastern gate there are two enormous idols of brass prostrate on the ground and held by stones, and everyone entering or leaving the mosque treads on them. The site was formerly occupied by an idol temple, and was converted into a mosque on the conquest of the city. In the northern court is the minaret, which has no parallel in the lands of Islam. It is built of red stone, unlike the rest of the edifice, ornamented with sculptures, and of great height. The ball on the top is of glistening white marble and its 'apples' [small balls surmounting a minaret] are of pure gold. The passage is so wide that elephants could go up by it. A person in whom I have confidence told me that when it was built he saw an elephant climbing with stones to the top. The Sultan Qutb-ad-Din<sup>1</sup> wished to build one in the western court even larger, but was cut off by death when only a third of it had been completed. This minaret is one of the wonders of the world for size, and the width of its passage is such that three elephants could mount it abreast. The third of it built equals in height the whole of the other minaret we have mentioned in the northern court, though to one looking at it from below it does not seem so high because of its bulk.

<sup>1</sup> This is a mistake of Ibn Batuta's; for Ala-ad-din actually commenced the second minar. Ibn Batuta dictated his travels *after* his return from them, and the mistake therefore represents a lapse of memory on his part.



## THE DELHI SULTANATE

Outside Delhi is a large reservoir named after the Sultan Lalmish, from which the inhabitants draw their drinking water. It is supplied by rain water, and is about two miles in length by half that breadth. In the centre there is a great pavilion built of squared stones, two stories high. When the reservoir is filled with water it can be reached only in boats, but when the water is low the people go into it. Inside it is a mosque, and at most times it is occupied by mendicants devoted to the service of God. When the water dries up at the sides of this reservoir, they sow sugar canes, cucumbers, green melons and pumpkins there. The melons and pumpkins are very sweet but of small size. Between Delhi and the Abode of the Caliphate is the private reservoir which is larger than the other. Along its sides there are about forty pavilions, and round about it live the musicians.

Mohammed Tughlak's troubles, largely of his own making, increased towards the end of his reign. His economic experiments, notably his attempt to introduce a token copper coinage, proved a failure; the Deccan revolted in 1347, and the Sultan died fighting in Gujarat in 1351. Like Akhnaten of Egypt, Charles XII of Sweden and Joseph II of Austria, he is one of the brilliant failures of history. His successor was his nephew, Firoz Shah. He restored order in Northern



India but made no attempt to recover the Deccan, which now became the celebrated Bahmani kingdom. In many ways Firoz was more modern-minded than any of these medieval kings. Though he continued the policy of intolerance to Hindus—in his time the *jizya* tax<sup>1</sup> was extended to Brahmins as well as all other Hindus—he had not the strain of ferocity which marked the earlier Turks, and he was very modern-minded in his interest in the welfare of his subjects. It was Firoz Shah who constructed the first canal in Northern India. It left the Jumna near Karnal and followed its western bank down to Hansi with a branch to Delhi. Restored by the Moguls it decayed again in the eighteenth century, only to be once more restored by the British as the Western Jumna Canal. But it is as an archæologist and lover of the past that Firoz Shah comes nearest to the present day. His most notable feat was the transportation of two Asoka pillars

<sup>1</sup> A poll tax on non-believers. Originally it was levied on non-Muslims in return for their protection and exemption from military service. But in countries like India, where the great majority of the population was non-Muslim, it came to be regarded as a mark of inferior status and was resented as such.

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

and their erection in Delhi. These pillars, already 1,500 years old, were found still intact, the one near Meerut and the other near Ambala.<sup>1</sup> The Meerut pillar was erected on the ridge near a hunting box of Firoz Shah, and close to the Hindu Rao hospital.<sup>2</sup> The Ambala pillar was used to adorn Firoz Shah's new palace of Firozabad. A graphic account is given by Shams-i Siraj Afif of the way in which the pillar was brought to Delhi. It was still standing and had first to be lowered on to a bed of cotton of the *sembal* tree. The pillar was then encased in reeds and raw skins, the cotton was removed, and it was levered on to a special carriage with 42 wheels. To each wheel a rope for 200 men was attached and in this way it was dragged to Delhi. It was carried to its present site up a specially made inclined slope and then raised to the perpendicular by means of windlasses, 18 inches at a time.<sup>3</sup> There it has

<sup>1</sup> The village of Tobra in the Ambala District, near Tajwalas the headwaters of the Western Jumna Canal.

<sup>2</sup> This pillar was broken in several pieces by an explosion during the siege of Delhi in 1857. These have been pieced together, but most of the inscription is missing.

<sup>3</sup> See Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III, pp. 351-2 (London, 1871).



## DELHI

stood ever since, withstanding all the vicissitudes of time, sieges and sacks, earthquakes and the still more destructive hand of man, with the loss of nothing but its golden top.<sup>1</sup> This pillar contains a full list of the Edicts of Asoka. Apart from his love of antiquity Firoz Shah was distinguished by his love of the monuments of the immediate past. In this he was still more ahead of his age than in his archæology, for the fashion of celebrating each new reign with new buildings had its corollary in the neglect of the old ones. This accounts for the disappearance of many famous buildings like Ala-ad-din's Hall of a Thousand Pillars. Firoz Shah was a great restorer. In particular he repaired the Qutb Minar, whose two top storeys had been damaged by an earthquake. These he replaced and surmounted them with a stone cupola which stood till 1794.<sup>2</sup> The two

<sup>1</sup> This was seen by William Finch in 1611. The top has also been injured either by lightning or cannon balls and it is possible that the damage occurred in the fighting between Imad-ul-Mulk and Safdar Jung, new and old viziers, respectively, in 1754.

<sup>2</sup> The top was damaged by an earthquake in that year. In 1803 a new cupola of late Mogul design was fixed by Major Smith, R.E., who also repaired the whole minar at the same time. In 1844 this was removed by Lord Hardinge as being out



## THE DELHI SULTANATE

surviving storeys can easily be distinguished from the earlier building by the difference of style, a smooth rounded surface replacing the perpendicular stone ridges which run up the rest of the tower and accentuate its sense of height. Another notable restoration was the repair of the Hauz Khas.

But Firoz Shah did not forget to perpetuate his name by his own buildings as well, and he is in fact one of the most notable of Delhi builder-kings. His principal achievement was the fortress palace of Firozabad, now known as Firoz Shah Kotla. This was built in 1354, and has been called by Mr Lane Poole the Windsor of Delhi. It does not indeed mark the transference of the capital to a fresh site; it was the New Delhi of the fourteenth century. When the palace had been completed suburbs grew up around it, until there were two cities, one at the Qutb, and one at Firozabad, separated by a few miles.

of keeping with the rest of the minar, and it is now to be found on the lawn to the left of the dak bungalow as you face the minar. The glass frames covering the cracks in the masonry of the lower storey of the minar, by means of which the slightest movement in the minar can be detected at once, should be noticed.

## DELHI

It does not appear that this city was regularly walled or fortified; no traces of fortifications have been discovered and the houses have of course disappeared. Perhaps the only traces of the city outside Firozabad are the Kalan Masjid, now embedded in the poorest quarter of Delhi City, near the Turkoman Gate, and the Chausath Khamba just behind the jail and adjacent to the new Irwin Hospital. Old Delhi (at the Qutb) continued to be a flourishing city; it was this city which we find Timur occupying in 1398, and it was then clearly the capital. For some years after this rival Tughlak chiefs occupied the Qutb and Firozabad respectively, each receiving allegiance from rival sets of provinces and carrying on intermittent warfare in the plains between the two cities. Firozabad was then no doubt a populous city, but it remained a Tughlak Windsor rather than a new capital. From this time onwards until the end of the eighteenth century it remained a centre of population in addition to the Qutb. Firoz Shah also had a hunting box on the ridge and the remains of it can still be seen close to the Hindu Rao Hospital. It was to adorn this hunting box



## THE DELHI SULTANATE

that one of the Asoka pillars was erected there.

Firoz Shah was also a patron of learning and religion. At a corner of the great Hauz Khas tank he built a college or *madrasa* for the study of Arabic, which is one of the best proportioned and most attractive buildings of the Tughlak period, and at the actual angle he constructed his own tomb, with sloping walls, austere and strong, where his own grave of stone and rough plaster can be seen. His prime minister, Khan Jahan, a converted Brahmin, constructed three mosques—the Kalan Masjid in Old Delhi, the Khirki Masjid (close to the wall of Jahanpannah about a mile from the Qutb), and a mosque in the village of Nizam-ad-din, which is now in ruins. We can picture Firoz Shah, learned and serious like a Turkish James I, with just enough common sense to keep his throne, but not enough to extend his dominions, holding his court in Firozabad, riding out to hunt on the Ridge, discussing theology and archæology in his intervals of leisure, inspecting buildings, giving orders for restorations and taking his pleasure upon the



## DELHI

shining waters of the Hauz Khas. He must have often visited it and loved it well, for it was there that he chose to lie for the rest of time.

Firoz Shah died in 1388, and with him the glory of the Tughlak dynasty departed. Palace intrigues distracted the court, revolt weakened the frontier, and the way was prepared for the doom of the Delhi Sultanate. Timurlane, or Timur the Lame, had reunited most of the dominions of the Mongols, and in 1398 he swept down upon Northern India. His march left a broad avenue of devastation, as if locusts had passed that way.

On 7 December Timur advanced from Panipat and his advance guard plundered Jahan Numa, Firoz Shah's pleasure palace on the Ridge. Then he crossed the river and took the fort of Loni, which can be seen on any clear day as a village on a mound from the *bund* by the river near Metcalfe House. On the 12th he was surprised while visiting the Ridge by a force under the Tughlak general, Mallu Khan. The Indians were repulsed but the incident led Timur to order the massacre of 100,000 Hindu male captives

## THE DELHI SULTANATE

in his camp whom he feared might try to join the enemy.

From Loni he crossed the river, marched over the site of the present Delhi city, and skirted Firozabad, to the neighbourhood of Safdar Jung's tomb. Here, on the morning of the 17th, in the open plain outside the city, on what is now the Willingdon Air Port and the site of the Gwalior pottery works, he found the army of Mahmud Tughlak drawn up to receive him. When battle was joined the Indians fought bravely, but were eventually overpowered by numbers and driven back to the city. Timur encamped that evening on the banks of the Hauz Khas 'which is so broad', remarks the chronicler, 'that a man cannot shoot an arrow across it'. The city surrendered the next day, and was peacefully occupied. But soon a brawl between the soldiers of the conqueror and the citizens led to a riot, and the riot to a sack and massacre. Timur stayed for only two weeks in Delhi, admiring the glory he had destroyed as Alaric did in Rome, and then on 1 January marched away through Firozabad to Wazirabad. From there he



## DELHI

crossed the Jumna and marched to Meerut. He did not annex northern India outright, but left Mahmud Shah upon the throne as a vassal. Timur marched home by a different route, leaving a second track of desolation in his wake, like the swathes of grass laid low by a scythe. The Delhi Empire never recovered from this blow. Mahmud Tughlak came back indeed, but he was the shadow of a king and his authority was disputed by rebellious governors, and even by a rival in Firozabad itself. The weakened resources can be gauged by the wall mosque which stands to the left of the Qutb-Delhi road near the Chor Minar. An inscription records that it was built in 1404 and speaks of the desolation caused by Timur, and the pitiful roughness of the building is eloquent testimony to the poverty of the times. Mahmud Tughlak died in 1414, after a reign of continual fighting and disorder, and with him the Tughlak dynasty came to an end.

## IV

### THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

THE fifteenth century forms an interlude to the first two imperial epochs of Delhi; it is an appendix to the Delhi Sultanate, and a preface to the Mogul Empire. Delhi is no longer the capital of a great empire, but sinks to the rank of a provincial city, a local capital often hardly controlling the country for more than a dozen miles around. The combination of feeble resources and immense claims produced the effect of an out-at-heels empire, something which was always falling short of expectations. But the fact that in this period the power of the kings cannot be compared either with that of the period which precedes or follows it should not blind us to other developments. If Delhi was no longer the imperial city, it became the home of the singularly beautiful Pathan or Lodhi style of building, a unique combination of Hindu and Muslim elements of architecture.



## DELHI

Its evolution can be traced through the royal tombs of the fifteenth century until it reached its height in the reigns of Humayun and Sher Shah. Sher Shah's mosque in the Purana Qila is perhaps the crowning achievement of that style. Its salient features are its excellent proportions, the harmonious blending of colours with white stone, red sandstone and black and white marble, and the happy combination of Muslim and Hindu architectural detail; the Muslim pointed with the Hindu transom arch, the Hindu bell and bracket work with the Muslim dome and ornamentation, the Hindu lotus with the Arabic script. Delhi has few finer treasures than the best examples of this style.

The successors of the Tughlaks were the Sayyid kings. At first they were but rulers in the name of the Timurids, and even when they claimed independence their authority never extended beyond the Panjab. Even there the real authority was in the hands of three noble Afghan families. In practice they controlled little more than the immediate neighbourhood of Delhi. Delhi was flanked on the east by the brilliant Sharqi dynasty

## THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

of Jaunpur, on the south by Malwa and on the west by the revived Rajput States. The shadowy forms of four Sayyid kings flit across the stage of Delhi until they were replaced by the most powerful of the Panjab nobles, Bahlol Lodhi, in 1451. They have left no memorial save their tombs; one of them, that of Mohammed Shah, may be found near Safdar Jung's tomb in what is now called the Lady Willingdon Park, and a group of others lie about a mile away from Safdar Jung's tomb on the plain to the left of the Qutb road.

Bahlol Lodhi was made of sterner stuff than the Sayyids. Though not of royal blood, and regarded as but *primus inter pares* by his fellow Afghan nobles, his vigour and his fighting ability made him the most effective ruler since Firoz Shah. By the end of his reign, by hard fighting, he had extended the limits of his effective power from the Indus to the Gumti.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The site of Bahlol Lodhi's tomb is uncertain, there being two claimants, with no inscriptions to decide between them. One is near Sikandar Lodhi's tomb in the Lady Willingdon Park and the other, and more probable site, is in the walled enclosure of Roshan Chiragh, Delhi, near the Qutb. *List of*



## DELHI

His son, Sikandar, continued his work, and by his conquest of Jaunpur restored the Delhi kingdom to something like the dimensions of an empire. For some years he resided at the Qutb, and the Moth-ki-Masjid<sup>1</sup> is evidence both of the development of the Lodhi style and of the city's prosperity at that time; but he later removed the capital to the neighbourhood of Agra and built a new city for himself at Sikandarabad where Akbar's tomb is now situated. Sikandar's son, Ibrahim, was the Rehoboam of the Lodhis. His pride, his suspicions and his severities proved too much for the turbulent and equality-loving Afghan chiefs, and were the immediate cause of the intrigues which brought the adventurer-genius, Babur, into the country. On the fatal field of Panipat in 1526, Ibrahim

*Hindu and Muhammadan Monuments, Delhi Province, Vol. III, pp. 138, 139.*

<sup>1</sup> The story of the mosque is as follows. One day the Sultan saw a grain of *moth* lying in the Jama Masjid and handed it to his minister, Mian Bhoiya. The minister thought that the seed so honoured by his master should not be lightly thrown away. He therefore sowed it, resowed the resulting grain, and continued this process until he had acquired enough money to build the beautiful mosque known, in honour of this incident, as the Moth-ki-Masjid.

## THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

was slain amidst his deserting troops, fighting bravely to the last like another Richard III, and the age of the great Moguls dawned in India.



## V

### THE MOGUL EMPIRE

DURING the period of the Mogul Empire Delhi reached the pinnacle of its glory, politically, economically and artistically. Humayun's tomb, the Fort and the Jama Masjid, the pomp and majesty of Aurangzeb's court, the fifty-two bazaars and thirty-six *mandis*<sup>1</sup> which supplied the city's needs, all testify to its greatness. But it must not be supposed that this greatness was spontaneous, or simultaneous, or even unchequered. For many years it was not the capital city at all, some emperors never visited it, or were absent for long periods, and its chief artistic achievements were prior to most of its political and economic importance. The history of Delhi under the Moguls was as full of vicissitudes as in previous pages, and it was perhaps most full of political activity at

<sup>1</sup> *Delhi Residency Records*, 'Report on customs and duties of Delhi Territory, 1820', paras. 199-201.

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

the very time that it was most afflicted by conflict, disorder and rapine.

After the battle of Panipat Babur passed the city by and hastened on to Agra, which had been the capital of the later Lodhis. During his reign Delhi continued a provincial city. His son, Humayun, however, returned to Delhi, and proceeded to celebrate the new dynasty by building a new city in its honour between 1530 and 1540. The city extended from the neighbourhood of Humayun's tomb to the present jail and the new cricket ground, where its northern limit is still marked by a gateway.<sup>1</sup> The citadel is a great imposing mass which ends the vista of Kingsway in New Delhi (until neatly obscured by the Irwin stadium) and contained within it the new royal palace. The Purana Qila, or old fort, is not to be confused with the ancient Hindu city of Indraprastha, which stood on approximately the same site, but of which of course nothing whatever remains. But before the new city was complete, the dynasty it was

<sup>1</sup> Locally known as the Khuni Darwaza or the Bloody Gate, because near it Mirza Mogul and two other Mogul princes were shot by Captain Hodson in 1857.



intended to celebrate was driven back to the Afghan hills by the Afghan adventurer, Sher Shah. He too celebrated his victory by constructing a city, but it was rather a new quarter of Humayun's city than a new town altogether. Fragments of a bazaar and one gate can still be seen near the Purana Qila. The Purana Qila itself continued to be the royal palace, and it was indeed completed by Sher Shah, who added the two buildings which still stand within it—the Sher Mandal, traditionally used as a library, and Sher Shah's Mosque, the best proportioned of all pre-Mogul buildings.<sup>1</sup> On Sher Shah's death in 1545 his empire rapidly crumbled away, but his son, Salim Shah (or Islam Shah) added another landmark to Delhi by building the Salimgarh to guard the ford over the Jumna where now the railway bridge spans the river. In Mogul times a state prison, it now contains the battery which fires the ceremonial salutes of the new imperial city.

The uneasy Afghan rule ended in 1556

<sup>1</sup> The critical visitor should note that there is evidence of three domes originally and that the present dome is not the original one.

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

with the return of Humayun, but within a few months of his return he fell down the steep stairs of his library when descending from the roof at sunset for the evening prayers. His son and successor was the great Akbar, who established his rule at the second battle of Panipat by defeating the Hindu general, Hemu, who had revived Hindu rule in Delhi for a short time, as Raja Vikramaditya. Akbar made Delhi his capital for about eight years. Here occurred the famous quarrel between his foster-brother, Adham Khan and his friend, Atgah Khan, which marks the beginning of his personal rule. The quarrel culminated in Adham Khan murdering Atgah in the palace, and, anxious to placate Akbar before others could influence him, rushing armed into the apartment where Akbar was resting. In one of those berserk furies which occasionally overtook him, Akbar sprang up, seized Adham Khan, carried him bodily to the open platform of the palace, and hurled him over the parapet. Henceforth the young Akbar removed his over-powerful foster-mother from the palace, and began to rule alone. Near the palace also an attempt was



## DELHI

made to assassinate Akbar in 1564 by a musket shot while he was riding through the city streets on his way back to the palace. It was perhaps disgust at this treatment which helped to form his decision to remove the capital to Agra once more.

For the rest of Akbar's reign Delhi was a provincial city again. The only monuments of the time are the tombs of Humayun and some of the great nobles, who wished to lie near the shrine of the saint, Nizam-ad-din. His son Jahangir, who reigned from 1603-27, rarely visited Delhi, and resided almost continuously at Lahore, and it is not till we reach the reign of Shah Jahan that the long interregnum in Delhi's imperial destiny is brought to an end.

Shah Jahan spent the first years of his reign embellishing the fort at Agra. 'Where Akbar built in stone, Shah Jahan built in marble.' It was not till 1638 that he decided to transfer the capital to Delhi. The traditional reason for this move was the refusal of the Agra merchants to agree to the driving of wide streets through their congested city to admit the passage of State processions and the vast

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

concourse of the court. So their refusal to submit to the petty losses of rebuilding led to the departure of the whole court and the permanent decay of the city.

Shah Jahan designed his new city of Shahjahanabad on lines more magnificent than any previous city. The city was placed just to the north of the preceding city of Humayun, measured four miles around, and was provided, in addition to the citadel-palace and the great mosque, with wide thoroughfares for the State processions. The city was completed in 1648, and has been the centre of Delhi ever since. The old cities of the Qutb region had long been in decay and now disappeared altogether. But the city of Humayun continued to shelter a large population for another 100 years, and became the old Delhi of the day in distinction from the new city of Shahjahanabad. For the next thirty-two years Delhi was the centre of the Mogul Empire at the height of its power and glory. The fame of its magnificence and the report of its emperors reached Europe and created the legend of the Great Mogul. These reports inspired Dryden to



## DELHI

write his *Tragedy of Aurangzeb*, attracted the French jeweller, Tavernier, who has left us an expert description of the Peacock Throne, and provoked the inquisitiveness of the French minister Colbert, which produced the invaluable description of the doctor Bernier. Nearly every great political event centred round Delhi. In the palace Shah Jahan was smitten with the illness which precipitated the celebrated war of succession among his sons; in the Shalimar Gardens, to the north of the city, Aurangzeb crowned himself while still in pursuit of his brother Dara; down the Chandni Chowk, eighteen months later, rode the humiliated and captive Dara with his head facing the tail of his horse amidst the tears of the populace: in the Salimgarh nearby he met his final doom.

But the centre of all this teeming life was the palace itself. Around it lay encamped the royal bodyguard and Rajput troops, who were the only troops allowed to retain their drums and to enter the palace fully armed. Beyond this open space, in a line now roughly marked by the Lothian Road in front of the Fort, lay the crowded bazaars of the city, shot

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

through by the great avenue of the Chandni Chowk. Here the nobles had their city houses, many of which still survive, and the narrow passages were thronged with armed retainers, secretaries, clerks, merchants, dependents and adventurers of all sorts, and the inevitable beggar. Beyond the city walls to the west, where the railway yards and the Sadar bazaar now stand, stood a series of markets where the supplies of the city were replenished. To the north along the banks of the Jumna, and following the course of the canal, lay numerous fruit and flower gardens, each within its walled enclosure, where the nobles retired for refreshment in the hot season. Altogether it has been reckoned that in the first half of Aurangzeb's reign Delhi contained approximately two million inhabitants.

The stately ceremonial of the court has been described by no one better than Bernier, and he shall now speak for himself.<sup>1</sup>

Opposite to the grand gate, which supports the *Nagar-Kanay*, as you cross the court, is a large and

<sup>1</sup> *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, by François Bernier, pp. 260-2, 263-4, 265-7, 268-70. Translated by Archibald Constable, 2nd edition revised by Vincent A. Smith (Oxford University Press, 1916).



## DELHI

magnificent hall, decorated with several rows of pillars, which, as well as the ceiling, are all painted and overlaid with gold. The hall is raised considerably from the ground, and very airy, being open on the three sides that look into the court. In the centre of the wall that separates the hall from the *Seraglio*, and higher from the floor than a man can reach, is a wide and lofty opening, or large window, where the monarch every day, about noon, sits upon his throne, with some of his sons at his right and left; while eunuchs standing about the royal person flap away the flies with peacocks' tails, agitate the air with large fans, or wait with undivided attention and profound humility to perform the different services allotted to each. Immediately under the throne is an enclosure, surrounded by silver rails, in which are assembled the whole body of *Omrahs*, the *Rajas*, and the *Ambassadors*, all standing, their eyes bent downward, and their hands crossed. At a greater distance from the throne are the *Mansebdars* or inferior *Omrahs*, also standing in the same posture of profound reverence. The remainder of the spacious room, and indeed the whole courtyard, is filled with persons of all ranks, high and low, rich and poor; because it is in this extensive hall that the King gives audience indiscriminately to all his subjects; hence it is called *Am-Kas*, or audience-chamber of high and low.

During the hour and a half, or two hours, that this ceremony continues, a certain number of the royal horses pass before the throne, that the King may see whether they are well used and in a proper condition.

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

The elephants come next, their filthy hides having been well washed and painted as black as ink, with two large red streaks from the top of the head down to the trunk, where they meet. The elephants are covered with embroidered cloth; a couple of silver bells are suspended to the two ends of a massive silver chain placed over their back, and white cow-tails from *Great Tibet*, of large value, hang from the ears like immense whiskers. Two small elephants, superbly caparisoned, walk close to these colossal creatures, like slaves appointed to their service. As if proud of his gorgeous attire and of the magnificence that surrounds him, every elephant moves with a solemn and dignified step; and when in front of the throne, the driver, who is seated on his shoulder, pricks him with a pointed iron, animates and speaks to him, until the animal bends one knee, lifts his trunk on high and roars aloud, which the people consider as the elephant's mode of performing the *taslim* or usual reverence.

\* \* \* \*

But all these things are so many interludes to more serious matters. The King not only reviews his cavalry with peculiar attention, but there is not, since the war has been ended, a single trooper or other soldier whom he has not inspected, and made himself personally acquainted with, increasing or reducing the pay of some, and dismissing others from the service. All the petitions held up in the crowd assembled in the *Am-Kas* are brought to the King and read in his hearing; and the persons concerned being ordered to approach are



## DELHI

examined by the Monarch himself, who often redresses on the spot the wrongs of the aggrieved party. On another day of the week he devotes two hours to hear in private the petitions of ten persons selected from the lower order, and presented to the King by a good and rich old man. Nor does he fail to attend the justice-chamber, called *Adalet-Kanay*, on another day of the week attended by the two principal *Kadis*, or chief justices. It is evident, therefore, that barbarous as we are apt to consider the sovereigns of *Asia*, they are not always unmindful of the justice that is due to their subjects.

What I have stated in the proceedings of the assembly of the *Am-Kas* appears sufficiently rational and even noble; but I must not conceal from you the base and disgusting adulation which is invariably witnessed there. Whenever a word escapes the lips of the King, if at all to the purpose, how trifling soever may be its import, it is immediately caught by the surrounding throng; and the chief *Omrahs*, extending their arms towards heaven, as if to receive some benediction, exclaim '*Karamat! Karamat!* wonderful! wonderful! he has spoken wonders!' Indeed there is no Mogol who does not know and does not glory in repeating this proverb in Persian verse:

If the monarch says that day is night,  
Reply:—'The moon and stars shine bright.'

\* \* \* \*

The grand hall of the *Am-Kas* opens into a more retired chamber, called the *Gosel-Kané*, or the place to

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

wash in. Few persons are permitted to enter this room, the court of which is not so large as that of the *Am-Kas*. The hall is, however, very handsome, spacious, gilt and painted, and raised four or five French feet from the pavement, like a large platform. It is in this place that the King, seated in a chair, his *Omrahs* standing around him, grants more private audiences to his officers, receives their reports, and deliberates on important affairs of state. Every *Omrah* incurs the same pecuniary penalty for omitting to attend this assembly in the evening as for failing to be present at the *Am-Kas* in the morning. The only grandee whose daily attendance is dispensed with is my Agah, *Danechmend-Kan* who enjoys this exemption in consequence of his being a man of letters, and of the time he necessarily devotes to his studies or to foreign affairs; but on Wednesdays, the day of the week on which he mounts guard he attends in the same manner as other *Omrahs*. This custom of meeting twice a day is very ancient; and no *Omrah* can reasonably complain that it is binding, since the King seems to consider it as obligatory upon himself as upon his courtiers to be present; nothing but urgent business, or serious bodily affliction, preventing him from appearing at the two assemblies. In his late alarming illness *Aureng-Zebe* was carried every day to the one or the other, if not to both. He felt the necessity of showing himself at least once during the twenty-four hours; for his disorder was of so dangerous a character that his absence though only for one day, might have thrown the whole kingdom



## DELHI

into trouble and insurrection and caused the closing of every shop.

Although the King, when seated in the hall of the *Gosel-Kanay*, is engaged about such affairs as I have mentioned, yet the same state is maintained for the most part as in the *Am-Kas*; but being late in the day, and the adjoining court being small, the cavalry of the *Omrahs* does not pass in review. There is this peculiar ceremony in the evening assembly, that all the *Mansebdars* who are on guard pass before the King to salute him with much form. Before them are borne with great ceremony that which they call the *Kours*, to wit, many figures of silver beautifully made, and mounted on large silver sticks: two of them represent large fish; two others a horrible and fantastic animal called *Eiedeha*; others are the figures of two lions; others of two hands, and others of scales; and several more which I cannot here enumerate, to which the Indians attach a certain mystic meaning. Among the *Kours* and the *Mansebdars* are mixed many *Gourze-berdars*, or mace-bearers chosen for their tall and handsome persons, and whose business it is to preserve order in assemblies, and to carry the King's orders, and execute his commands with the utmost speed.

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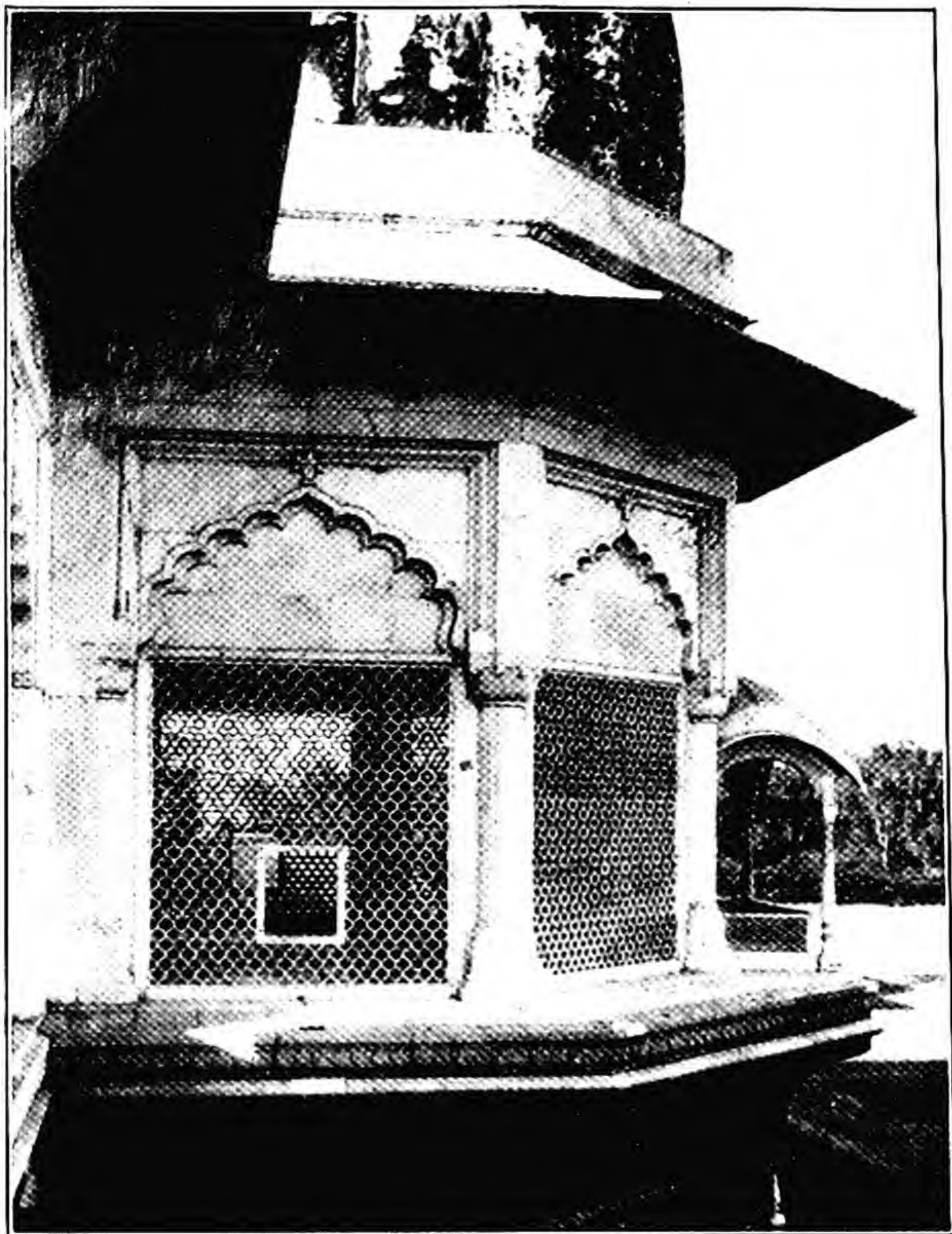
\*

Before taking our final leave of the fortress, I wish to recall your attention to the *Am-Kas*, which I am desirous to describe as I saw it during certain annual festivals; especially on the occasion of the rejoicings



MOTH-KI-MASJID





JHAROKA, DELHI FORT

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

that took place after the termination of the war. Never did I witness a more extraordinary scene.

The King appeared seated upon his throne, at the end of the great hall, in the most magnificent attire. His vest was of white and delicately flowered satin, with a silk and gold embroidery of the finest texture. The turban, of gold cloth, had an aigrette whose base was composed of diamonds of an extraordinary size and value, besides an Oriental topaz, which may be pronounced unparalleled, exhibiting a lustre like the sun. A necklace of immense pearls, suspended from his neck, reached to the stomach, in the same manner as many of the *Gentiles* wear their strings of beads. The throne was supported by six massy feet, said to be of solid gold, sprinkled over with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. I cannot tell you with accuracy the number or value of this vast collection of precious stones, because no person may approach sufficiently near to reckon them, or judge of their water and clearness; but I can assure you that there is a confusion of diamonds, as well as other jewels, and that the throne, to the best of my recollection, is valued at four *Kourours* of *Roupies*. I observed elsewhere that a *Lecque* is one hundred thousand *roupies*, and that a *Kourour* is a hundred *Lecques*; so that the throne is estimated at forty millions of *roupies*, worth sixty millions of pounds (*livres*) or thereabouts. It was constructed by *Chah-Jehan*, the father of *Aureng-Zebe*, for the purpose of displaying the immense quantity of precious stones accumulated successively in the treasury from the spoils of ancient *Rajas* and *Patans*, and the



## DELHI

annual presents to the Monarch, which every *Omrah* is bound to make on certain festivals. The construction and workmanship of the throne are not worthy of the materials; but two peacocks, covered with jewels and pearls, are well conceived and executed. They were made by a workman of astonishing powers, a *Frenchman* by birth, . . . who, after defrauding several of the Princes of *Europe*, by means of false gems, which he fabricated with peculiar skill, sought refuge in the *Great Mogol's* court, where he made his fortune.

At the foot of the throne were assembled all the *Omrahs*, in splendid apparel, upon a platform surrounded by a silver railing, and covered by a spacious canopy of brocade with deep fringes of gold. The pillars of the hall were hung with brocades of a gold ground, and flowered satin canopies were raised over the whole expanse of the extensive apartment fastened with red silken cords, from which were suspended large tassels of silk and gold. The floor was covered entirely with carpets of the richest silk, of immense length and breadth. A tent, called the *aspek*, was pitched outside, larger than the hall, to which it joined by the top. It spread over half the court, and was completely enclosed by a great balustrade, covered with plates of silver. Its supporters were pillars overlaid with silver, three of which were as thick and as high as the mast of a *barque*, the others smaller. The outside of this magnificent tent was red, and the inside lined with elegant *Masli-patam* chintzes, figured expressly for that very purpose

## THE MOGUL EMPIRE

with flowers so natural and colours so vivid, that the tent seemed to be encompassed with real parterres.

As to the arcade galleries round the court, every *Omrah* had received orders to decorate one of them at his own expense, and there appeared a spirit of emulation who should best acquit himself to the Monarch's satisfaction. Consequently all the arcades and galleries were covered from top to bottom with brocade, and the pavement with rich carpets.

On the third day of the festival, the King, and after him several *Omrahs*, were weighed with a great deal of ceremony in large scales, which, as well as the weights, are, they say, of solid gold. I recollect that all the courtiers expressed much joy when it was found that *Aureng-Zebe* weighed two more pounds than the year preceding.



## VI

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

IN 1680 Aurangzeb left Delhi for the Deccan and spent the rest of his life wasting his and the empire's strength in the fruitless struggle against the Marathas. When he died in 1707 at the age of ninety-one the empire was financially exhausted, rent with dissensions, and disorder was raising its head. His son Bahadur Shah, who had for forty years trembled at the sight of his father's handwriting, lest he should share the fate of his uncles, his elder brother and nephew, succeeded him at the age of 63 and spent five troubled years trying to pacify the country. He wore himself out in travelling, and though he more than once passed Delhi on his marches, he never set foot in the Red Fort, and died in Lahore in 1712.

From this time Delhi again became the metropolis of the empire until the empire

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

itself ceased to exist. But the conditions were very different to those of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. The great Moguls of the seventeenth century degenerated into embarrassed phantoms in the eighteenth century, who retired more and more beneath the shadow of noble king-makers, each more unscrupulous than the last. As the generation of Aurangzeb's lieutenants died out, loyalty became an unfashionable virtue, patriotism a distant memory, and statesmanship a lost art. Leadership and bravery remained, but they attached themselves to the disintegrating forces which are never far from the surface of Indian politics. From being a despotism tempered by rebellion the empire became a drama of personal ambitions, punctuated by assassination. During seventy-six years the Mogul sun was setting against a blood-red sky of Persian and Afghan invasions, Maratha depredations, Jat raids, civil wars, noble conflicts, treachery, alternate pusillanimity and heroism, until it disappeared with the crimes of Ghulam Khadir. It is not our purpose to discuss here the causes of the fall of the empire; here we must confine ourselves to pointing out the



principal stages in the ruin of the city during those years.

Until 1739 Delhi was still the political centre of India, still a really imperial city with its court, its retinue and its armies, its thronging bazaars, wealthy merchant caravans and busy markets. But during this time certain premonitory signs, like the first rumblings which often presage a disastrous earthquake, or the gradually approaching thunder of a tropical storm, each more ominous than the last, may be noted. First—‘a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand’—was the embassy of the East India Company led by John Surman, which stayed in Delhi from 1714–17. With the aid of the skill of Dr Hamilton, the embassy surgeon, who cured the Emperor Farrukhsiyar of a dangerous disease, the Company obtained extensive privileges which strengthened their position in Bengal and so laid the foundation of the later British dominion. Then came the accession of Mohammed Shah Rangila (the Merry or Pleasure-loving) whose pleasure-loving nature was too feeble to rule for himself, but crafty enough to prevent any one

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

else ruling for him. For twenty-eight years he survived the ceaseless intrigues of the court, until at his death it was realized that he had survived the empire itself. Only one thing is known to his credit, that he ordered the court poets to compose their *ghazals* or love poems in Urdu instead of in Persian, and so did much to develop the still nascent Urdu poetry. The next and much more ominous sign was the withdrawal of the minister, Nizam-ul-Mulk, from Delhi to the Deccan in 1726, in despair at the frivolity, intrigues and lack of serious purpose of the court. Here he preserved a dominion which has become the modern state of Hyderabad, and is the only surviving fragment of the Mogul Empire and the last refuge of its traditions. The last of Aurangzeb's school, with its tradition of fidelity and public duty, he took with him all that was best and most staunch amongst the Moguls. His departure was like the flight of the swallow as it feels the onset of winter, or of the sea-gulls which fly inland before the approaching storm.

Another warning, which showed the



## DELHI

increasing insecurity, and turbulence of the capital itself, was the famous Shoe-sellers' Riot in the Jama Masjid in 1729.

Among a certain class of Mohammedans the first half of the month Shaban is devoted to festivities, among the chief of which are the illumination of lamps and the discharge of fireworks in the streets. In the evening of 8 March 1729, one Subhkaran, a jeweller belonging to the imperial establishment, was on his way home, his route lying behind the Jauhari bazaar, past the shoe-sellers' shops in the square of Sadullah Khan, situated to the south of the palace. These shoe-sellers were all Punjabis, and their shops, which were large and numerous, lined both sides of the road. They were also stout Mohammedans, strict in their prayers, many knowing the Koran by heart. As the munshi's *palki* approached, both Hindus and Muslims were busy letting off squibs in the way usual at this time of year. One of these squibs fell into the *palki* and burnt a hole in the munshi's durbar clothes, whereupon the munshi's servants remonstrated, and after words on both sides the two parties came to blows. One of the retinue had his sword and shield taken from him. Subhkaran returned home in great wrath, and ordered the man who had been disarmed to return and punish his assailants.

After nightfall this man, accompanied by his friends, returned, and caught a youth who was beaten till he almost died. Hearing the boy's cries a certain Haji

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Hafiz came to his rescue and in so doing received a sword cut and fell down dead: whereupon the assailants, leaving the body where it fell, made off home. At dawn the shoe-sellers gathered round the body and swore that until the murderer and his employer were killed the body should lie unburied, and they took the body and laid it before the door of Subhkaran.

Now Subhkaran had two friends, high officials at the Court—one Sher Afghan Panipati, then Lord Chamberlain, and the other Zafar Khan Roshan-ad-daulah, by whose aid he had obtained an imperial rank. During the night he therefore sought refuge in the mansion of Sher Afghan Panipati, who refused to give him up to the mob. Thereupon the mob went away and made complaint to Mohammed Shah who gave an order to the Vizier Qamar-ad-din to send and arrest the accused wherever he might be found. But Sher Afghan refused absolutely to comply with this order. And thus Thursday passed.

From early dawn on the Friday the shoe-sellers gathered together crowds of supporters and they all repaired to the Great Mosque where the Friday prayers were being said. They so crowded on the praying space and the pulpit that the service was interrupted, while the noise and confusion increased every moment. Soon blows and curses were showered on the Qazi and the expounder of the law, and they were accused of supporting the unbeliever. Swords were not drawn, but the Qazi and his son were buffeted and kicked till almost dead, and the expounder and reciter were



## DELHI

dragged off the pulpit and thrown on the ground and thoroughly thumped till they nearly fainted.

When reports of the outbreak reached the palace the Emperor ordered the Vizier and Roshan-ad-daulah to go with their troops and allay the disturbance. The Vizier entered the mosque first by the northern gate and by his smooth talk and promise of help abated for the time the vigour of the assault. Unfortunately Roshan-ad-daulah now appeared with his followers at the main or eastern gate, used by the Emperor, his retinue being made up of ignorant Afghans, puffed up with notions of their own valour. Also from the southern direction there also advanced Sher Afghan Khan, with his armed train of Hindustanis. Thus the shoe-makers were trapped in the midst of their opponents.

With the idea of preventing more men from crowding into the mosque, Roshan-ad-daulah ordered his Afghans to close the gates. But the sight of Roshan-ad-daulah and Sher Afghan Khan once more roused the mob to fury and with cries of 'The Faith! The Faith!' and 'Strike the infidels on the face', they brought forth their only weapons, the iron-heeled shoes that they had hid under their armpits and the stones and brickbats that they had collected in the long skirts of their clothing. These they hurled at the nobles with loud curses and foul abuse. On Sher Afghan fell the first brunt of the attack, and his dignity was subjected to the indignity 'of being struck by these shoes and other missiles'. Others which passed him struck the plumes of Roshan-ad-daulah's gold-brocaded head dress. The

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

rioters then attacked the Afghans who were standing behind their masters. The Vizier, a rival of Roshan-ad-daulah's, held aloof near the pulpit, a mere onlooker.

At last, alarmed by the danger to the two nobles and the attack on themselves, the Afghans lost all patience and set upon the attacking party, sword in hand and shield on arm, and the bazaar men would soon have got the worst of it, but the artillery, which had taken up their cause, now fell on them armed with fusils and European pistols. Joined with them was a body of unruly Moguls from Mogulpura. Wild excitement reigned and the ranks of both sides were inextricably mingled. Then the Vizier's Moguls, too, unable to restrain themselves any longer joined with the shoe-sellers in the fray.

The other Mogul troops were drawn up outside the mosque waiting to escort the Vizier on his return. Excited at what was taking place inside, these men rode up the flight of steps leading to the gates, dispersed the Afghan guard, and with one shout ran at full speed into the mosque. Following them came the Vizier's elephants and camels. The excitement increased, and many of the rioters lost their lives. After holding out as long as they were able and having seen many of their comrades fall, the Afghans began to yield ground. Sher Afghan Khan received a cut in his right wrist and his sword fell from his grip. Some of his followers were killed and others wounded. As Sher Afghan Khan's followers retreated, the bodyguard around Roshan-ad-daulah also gave way, and his bulk and corpulence rendering



## DELHI

him incapable of nimble movement, his followers bore him away on their shoulders. These two nobles sought refuge in the mansion of Dil-deler Khan, Sher Afghan Khan's elder brother. The rioters wished to follow and burn Dil-deler Khan's house, but in the end they were persuaded to desist. A number of the nobles in the train of Roshan-ad-daulah, who had no taste for fighting, hid themselves in the corners and arches of the mosque. Driven from these refuges by the bullets, they clambered over the arches adjoining the bazaar and let themselves down into the street as best they could. One great man, Azam Khan, in thus escaping met with a ridiculous adventure. Below the place where he climbed over was a thatched shop full of earthenware pots. In spite of the strength of the thatch his legs went through and he was caught in the beams and bamboo supports. The shopkeeper, angry at the damage done, seized a bamboo and belaboured poor Azam Khan's feet so that they became all swollen and broken and for many days he was unable to stand.

As a result of the day's doings the Vizier, without moving hand or foot, became the popular hero and defender of Islam, and in token of his approval the Emperor sent him as a present the turban from off his own head. The murdered shoe-seller was buried that night on the site of the munshi's house, which had been demolished by the crowd. In the end a mosque was erected over the grave and for many years this affair formed the theme of poems—both in Persian and Hindi.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The above is transcribed by permission of Mrs

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The clouds were now heavy in the sky, and to the first heavy drops of rain may be likened the Maratha raid of 1737. Two imperial armies were operating near Agra against the Marathas, but Baji Rao with a body of cavalry slipped between them, marched 120 miles in 48 hours, and arrived at Kalka Devi (near Okhla) on 9 April 1737, when the Ram Naumi festival was in full swing and it was crowded with holiday-making Hindu citizens from Delhi. The plundered citizens spread panic in the city, which was heightened when the hastily collected imperial troops, led by the young court nobles, were scattered by the Marathas near the modern Talkatora gardens. This was the first appearance of the Marathas in Delhi, and a warning of future doom.

Mohammed Shah, like Louis XV, whom in many ways he resembled, acted on the motto *après moi le déluge*, but unlike Louis he was not quick enough to quit the earth in time. The deluge descended in the very next year,

Margaret L. Seymour from the account of the riot given by the late William Irvine in his *Later Mughals*, Vol. II, pp. 257-62 (M. C. Sarkar and Sons, Calcutta, 1922).



## DELHI

in the form of the invasion of Nadir Shah, the Persian. The Mogul army was defeated at Karnal, and the emperor captured by a combination of rashness, pusillanimity, treachery and trickery, and on 9 March 1739, Nadir Shah<sup>1</sup> entered Delhi in triumph. Within a few days a riot against the Persian soldiery provoked Nadir Shah to order an indiscriminate massacre of the citizens, which was only stopped after five hours of slaughter at the entreaty of Mohammed Shah in the posture of a suppliant. The Shah sat on the roof of the Golden Mosque next to the modern Police Station in the Chandni Chowk during this massacre, and the portion of the city which suffered most severely was the Chandni Chowk itself and particularly the Dariba. The entrance to this street is still called the Khuni Darwaza or Bloody Gate, from this circumstance. To the terror of this massacre was added the systematic spoliation of the city and palace. When Nadir Shah left Delhi in March 1739, he took with him the Peacock Throne, bullion, jewels and costly stuffs, art

<sup>1</sup> For Nadir Shah see Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Vol. II, Chaps. xi, xii, xiii.

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

treasures, stores and arms of all sorts estimated at a total value of seventy crores (£70,000,000 at the then rate of exchange). The Peacock Throne was alone estimated by Tavernier to be worth £12,000,000.<sup>1</sup> Each soldier received 18 months' pay and all taxes in Persia were remitted for three years. Delhi awoke as from a nightmare to find its families ravished, its merchants ruined, its troops dispersed and its court humbled and helpless. Almost the only redeeming feature was the fate of Saadat Ali Khan, the chief traitor at Karnal. Arrived in Delhi, in the conqueror's train, he was so deeply humiliated by Nadir Shah in public that he went home to his house and took poison.

Delhi appeared to regain some of its prosperity in the next ten years, but its position as a great city was finally destroyed by the tumults and invasions of the decade 1751-61. First the civil war between the rival ministers, Safdar Jung (whose tomb now adjoins the New Delhi aerodrome) and Imad-ul-Mulk,

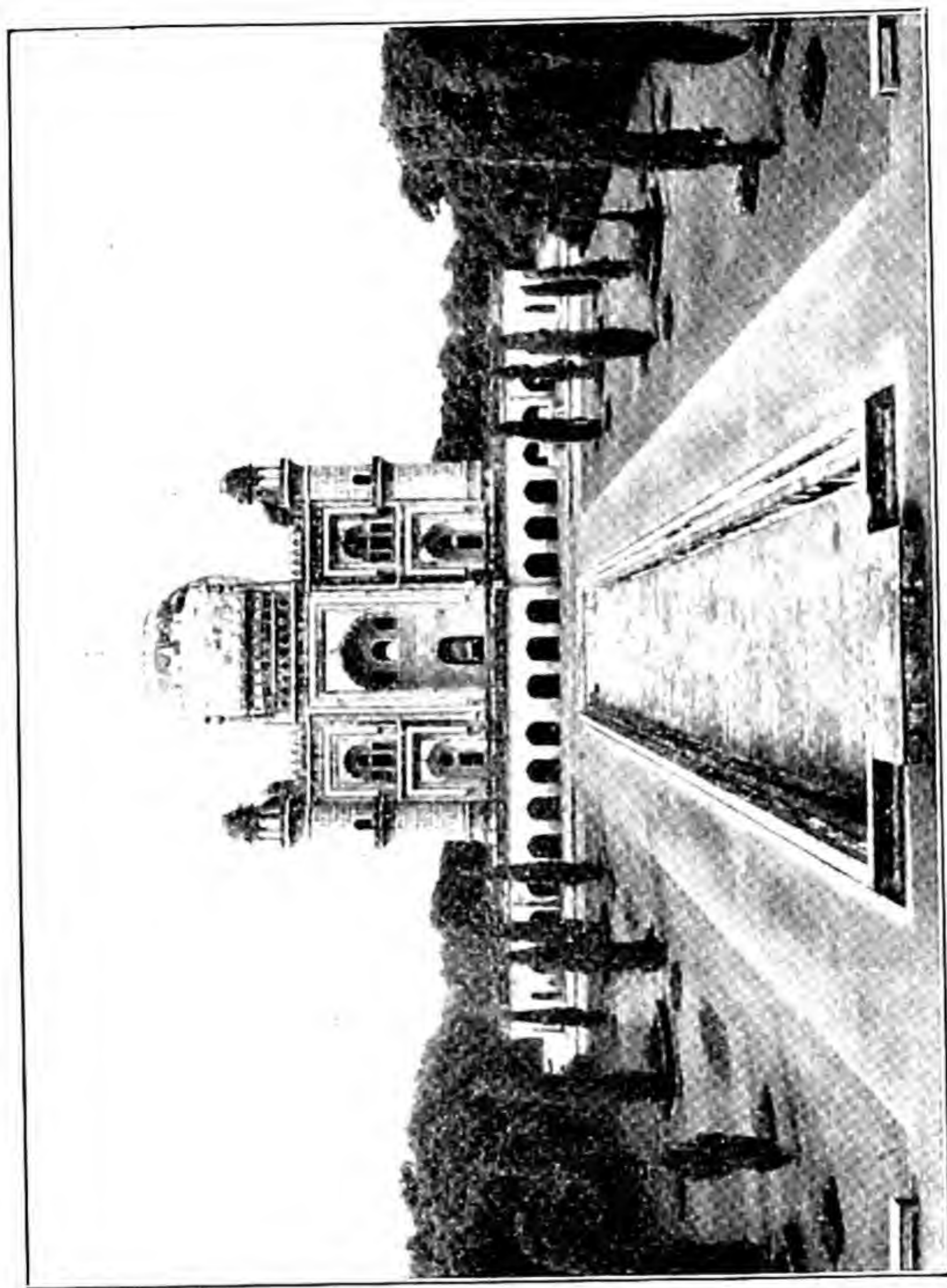
<sup>1</sup> *Travels in India*, by J-B. Tavernier, Vol. I, p. 305. Translated by V. Ball, 2nd edition revised by W. Crooke (Oxford University Press, 1925).



## DELHI

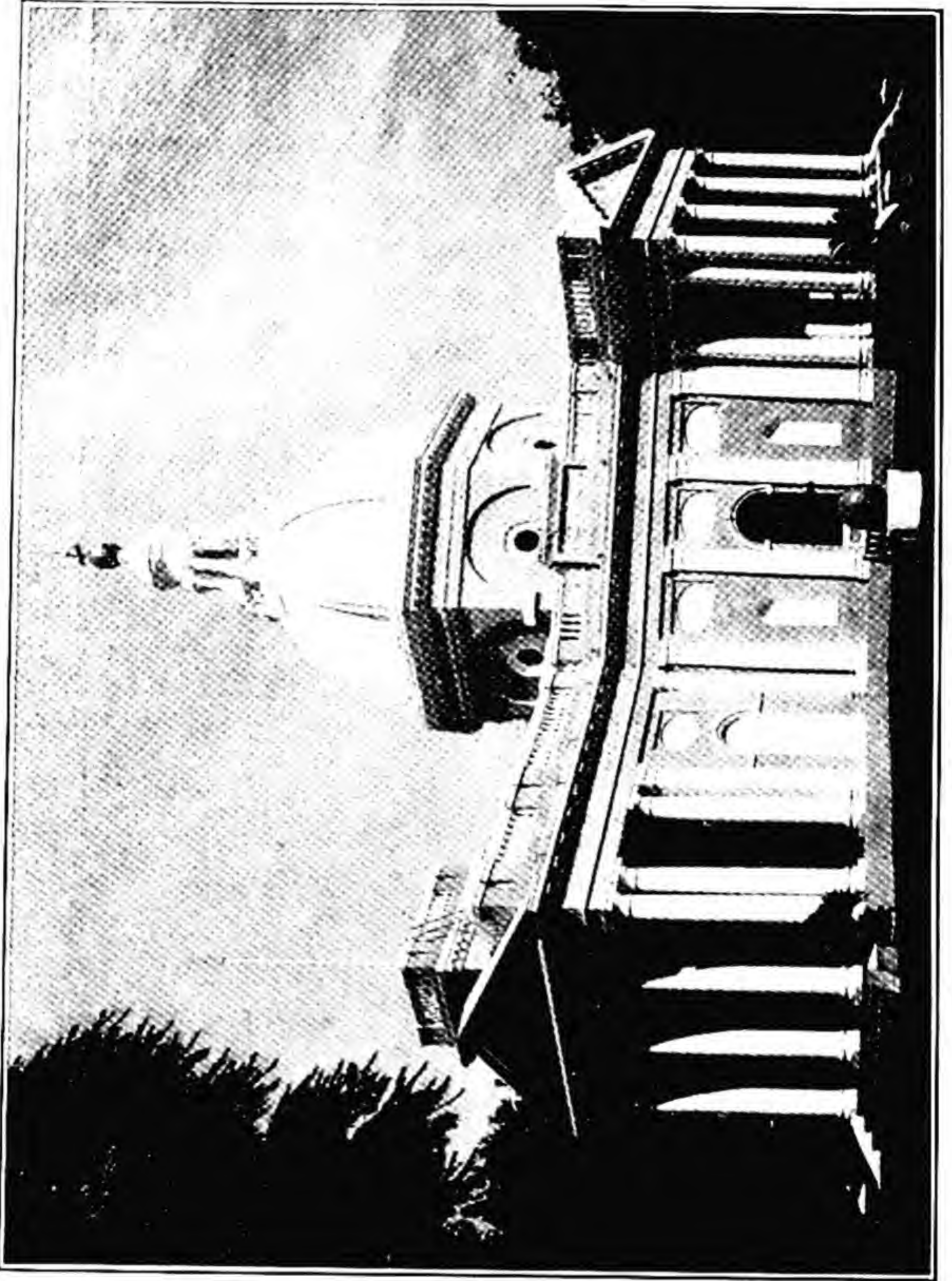
who eclipsed even William Pitt's record by his appointment as Vizier or Prime Minister at the age of 17, did much to wreck Old Delhi, as Humayun's city was called. For six months Safdar Jung in Old Delhi and Imad-ul-Mulk in Shahjahanabad cannonaded each other and skirmished in the space between the cities. Then the alternate occupation of the city by Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan successor of Nadir Shah, and the Marathas from 1757-61 completed the ruin of the city. What Nadir had spared Ahmad Shah destroyed, what Ahmad Shah had overlooked the Marathas carried away. It was at this time that the silver ceiling of the Diwan-i-Khas was removed by the Marathas and Imad-ul-Mulk between them. Two emperors and many others were assassinated during this time, the heir apparent had to flee for his life by night to escape the vengeance of the minister, and the Government looked on helplessly while one army after another advanced, plundered the unhappy citizens, and marched off with their loot.

The battle of Panipat when the Afghan king, by crossing the Jumna at Baghpat after



SAFDAR JUNG'S TOMB





ST JAMES'S CHURCH

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

a forced march, had taken the advancing Marathas in the rear, cut off their supplies and finally destroyed them, was the culmination of this series of misfortunes of Delhi. The worst was then over, for though the lordship of Hindustan was not settled by the battle, the chief combatants were exhausted, and Delhi was granted a breathing space. Ahmad Shah was too occupied by his own turbulent Afghan subjects to exploit his victory, and the Marathas were too weak to renew their advance for ten years. During the next twenty-seven years therefore, Delhi was the centre of a small kingdom held together by the exertions of a series of dictators. The Empire of Hindustan had become the Kingdom of Delhi. The new situation was expressed in the couplet:

Az Delhi to Palam  
Badshahi Shah Alam.  
(From Delhi to Palam  
Is the realm of Shah Alam.)

The first of these dictators, the Rohilla Najib Khan, ruled Delhi for ten years as the representative of the fugitive Shah Alam, and the servant of the Afghan Ahmad Shah. He



## DELHI

kept at bay Marathas, Jats and Sikhs, and re-established some kind of order in the neighbouring districts. On his death in 1770, and the final passing of the Afghan menace, Shah Alam determined to return to the capital from his pensioned ease at Allahabad under British protection. He entered the city by the bridge of boats (close to the modern railway bridge) and the Calcutta Gate on 6 January 1772. For the next ten years his minister, the Persian Mirza Najaf Khan,<sup>1</sup> held power firmly, and slowly increased the Mogul influence. For the last time the rays of the Mogul sun shone wanly like the feeble light on a winter's afternoon.

In 1782 came a catastrophe which completed the ruin of the countryside. This time nature added her blows to those of man. The rains failed and the Delhi district was visited by the severest famine recorded since the time of Mohammed Tughlak. There was no means of obtaining relief and it is estimated that two-thirds of the rural

<sup>1</sup> The remains of his tomb can be seen near the tomb of Safdar Jung on the opposite side of the Qutb road, and a few yards further on towards the Qutb.

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

population perished. When the British resettled the district thirty years later the cultivated area had still not recovered its former extent, and many villages were still depopulated. At this moment Najaf Khan, the sole real hope of the State, died, and at once discords broke out amongst the nobles which Shah Alam was too weak to control. Thus the cup of Delhi's bitterness was filled, and it only remained for it to brim over.

In 1788 came the final act of the tragedy. The Marathas had been called in three years before as the protectors of the Emperor, but during a temporary lapse of vigilance on the part of Madho Rao Scindia, the Maratha general, the city was seized by Ghulam Kadir, a Rohilla chief in the imperial service. Ghulam, who very probably was mentally unbalanced, seized Shah Alam, demanded treasure, and on the king's denial of its existence, tore up the palace floor, insulted the royal family, and finally blinded the king with his own hands. Shah Alam was never more noble than at this moment; when the Rohilla mockingly asked him what he could



## DELHI

now see, he replied, 'Nought but the Holy Koran between me and thee'. His ode on his blindness is one of the most moving poems in Urdu literature.

This atrocity excited execration even amongst that generation of men, hardened in the school of Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah and the Marathas. It benefited no one except the Marathas, who now, posing as the avengers of the sightless king, reduced him to the position of a dignified pensionary. Although blindness is usually considered a disqualification for kingship in India, they did not replace Shah Alam by any other Mogul prince; a blind puppet was easier to manipulate than one with all his faculties, they said, and added the very Maratha argument that his court would be cheaper to maintain. Ghulam Kadir did not long escape. After a brief strutting upon the stage of Delhi, he fled at the approach of Scindia and was captured near Meerut. For some time he was exhibited in a cage in which he could neither stand nor sit nor lie, and was then executed with every circumstance of ignominy.

This was the end of the Mogul family as an

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

independent ruling power, and of Delhi as a metropolitan Indian city. For fifteen years Scindia controlled Delhi and used the Emperor's name to give a cloak of legality to his acts. The city, though impoverished and reduced, at last enjoyed peace. Then in 1803 the Marathas went to war with the East India Company. The British, under Lord Lake, defeated the army of Scindia on the left bank of the Jumna, just opposite Humayun's tomb, and occupied Delhi. The aged king received the British general under a tattered canopy in the Diwan-i-Khas, and recognized British authority in exchange for protection and maintenance. Shah Alam's material position was improved, but though he did not realize it, his hope of independence was gone for ever.

The Maratha war was not yet over and the next year Delhi had to stand a siege from the victorious Maratha general, Jaswant Rao Holkar. The crumbling walls of Shahjahanabad were hastily repaired by Sir David Ochterloney, and after a fortnight the Marathas raised the siege. As a result of this threat the whole circuit of the walls was



## DELHI

repaired, squarer bastions and detached martello towers suitable for artillery were added. These works can still be seen on the north-east and south faces of the wall, and the mingling of British and Mogul work detected in the stonework. In 1806, as if to mark the end of an epoch, Shah Alam died at the age of 83, and Delhi after seventy years of storm and stress, confusion and disorder, entered upon fifty years of peace and security.

## VII

### THE TWILIGHT OF THE MOGULS

THIS period, the twilight of Mogul Delhi, has a charm and an interest quite different from any of the periods that have gone before it.

The tumult and the shouting dies,  
The captains and the kings depart.

There is left the glitter and the culture of the nobles without their suicidal struggle for power, the dignity and learning of the court, without its folly and its weakness. Literary struggles replaced political, the poet laureate in importance the prime minister, and interest centered upon the first contacts of English and western with Persian and Indian culture. The Qila-i-Mualla, the Exalted Fort, no longer a centre of political power, now surprisingly became the intellectual centre, and successive literary emperors presided over a mild literary and intellectual renaissance.



## DELHI

The city itself had sunk to but a fraction of its former size. Old Delhi, or Humayun's city, now lay so completely derelict that before the coming of the British, it was not safe to pass through it, for fear that one might be shot at from behind some ruin. The origin of Asoka's pillar was forgotten, and its Pali inscription was not yet decipherable. The old Mogul gardens and palaces were ruined, and the habitable city was confined within the walls of Shahjahanabad with a few suburbs in the direction of Sabzimandi and Paharganj. The population was no more than 150,000. Outside Kashmir Gate the first houses of the new civil station were built, culminating in the mansion of Sir T. Metcalfe on the banks of the Jumna, and six miles away to the north the Gardens of Shalimar were still used by the Resident. The Ridge was crowned by the mansion of the Maratha nobleman, Hindu Rao, and the cantonment lay in the plain beyond, where the Old Viceregal Estate and the golf course now lie. Within the city the area called Daryaganj, between the Fort and the Delhi Gate, became the European subordinates'

## THE TWILIGHT OF THE MOGULS

and commercial quarter. Many of the old bungalows have only recently been swept away and the Deputy Commissioner's house, with its high columned veranda surmounted by the royal arms, may still be seen amidst a mushroom growth of modern flats. To the south from the Delhi Gate, ruins of tombs and mosques stretched away as far as the Qutb, which had become a little country town used by the surviving nobility as a country retreat. The Emperor had a palace there (whose imposing gateway just outside Qutb Shah's *dargah* still stands) to which he resorted every summer during the rains for the game which abounds in the broken country just beyond. A visit to Delhi was essential for all travellers in Northern India. If the visitor had any influence, like Bishop Heber or Sleeman, he called on the Emperor, and wrote in his journal comparisons between 'the former and the latter state of the House of Timur'. If he were an artist he sketched the ruins, a habit which has given us the famous prints of Daniells.

The centre of the social life of Delhi, the waning afterglow of Mogul glory, was



## DELHI

undoubtedly the palace. Amidst much decay and squalor caused by the presence of nearly 2,000 *salateen* or royal princes, dwelt the last emperors in modest state and not undignified ease. The old court customs were kept up as far as possible; the Emperor would still go to the Jama Masjid on an elephant on festal occasions; still was weighed against gold, silver, precious stones and five kinds of grain upon his birthday; still held *darbars* and issued titles. To be received at court was still the ambition of men of good family. But besides this the royal patronage of the arts was a reality. Painting in miniature experienced a transient revival, and literature a real impetus. Bahadur Shah, the last emperor, was himself a respectable poet, and in his reign Zouk was the poet laureate, and Ghalib his rival.

From the court we may turn to the city. Though it had no longer a government and an army to bring it prosperity, it was yet a thriving commercial centre—the chief centre of distribution of goods from the Panjab and the north-west. Down the Chandni Chowk jostled the men and the fashions of all

## THE TWILIGHT OF THE MOGULS

India, from Pathans and Punjabi traders to half Europeanized eccentrics like the Mogul Prince Jahangir. Expansion was in the air, and one deputy commissioner gained fame by constructing a new suburb on model lines which was called Deputy Ganj. The last element of the city was the European, who lived in Daryaganj and in the Civil Lines outside Kashmir Gate. Their large bungalows dotted the approaches to the Ridge, and their chaises and buggies, their hunts and balls, their pride and their eccentricities both irritated and fascinated the Delhi populace. Apparently guaranteeing the *status quo*, they were a portent of things to come, and the wiser spirits within the walls realized their significance.

The first contact of European and Mogul led to the most interesting feature of all in pre-Mutiny Delhi, an intellectual renaissance. As the learned men of Delhi came into contact with the new learning, and pondered over their misfortunes and the future, a section of them came to see in the new scientific learning of the west a way of renewal and rebirth. Eager discussions under the stars bore fruit



## DELHI

and found expression in the translation of western works into Urdu, and the foundation of Delhi College with its double Oriental and English departments. There was more genuine thought and speculation in Delhi a hundred years ago than there is today.<sup>1</sup>

The pre-Mutiny world of Delhi, with its courtly ceremonial and poetizing kings, its learned greybeards and its ancient memories, with, on its outskirts, its self-confident new governors, seems today a dream-world of mellow light and shifting shadows. How long it would have lasted before melting into the general stream of modern Indian life it is impossible to say, but it was essentially a decaying world with its eye on the past, and it could not have survived indefinitely. However attractive it may be wistfully to look back upon, pre-Mutiny Delhi was more of a historical museum than a living reality. Sooner or later the dream must have faded into garish reality. Dalhousie, the creator and destroyer of so much, sounded the first note of the end when he decreed the abolition of the imperial

<sup>1</sup> For a further description of this renaissance see C. F. Andrews, *Zaka-ullah of Delhi*, pp. 1-46 (Heffer, 1929).

## THE TWILIGHT OF THE MOGULS

title on the death of Bahadur Shah, and the transference of the imperial family to the Qutb. This would have been the signal for the disintegration of the dream-world of Mogul Delhi, and the Mutiny therefore only came to end violently and abruptly what would inevitably have passed away in a few years time.



## VIII

### THE MUTINY IN DELHI

DELHI was as unprepared for the Mutiny as any other part of India, and it proved to be quite as disagreeable for the citizens as for the English residents in the cantonments. There is no solid evidence that the Mogul Emperor had anything to do with its outbreak, though there was plenty of discontent in the palace at the time.

It was on a sultry May morning (the 11th) that the mutineers from Meerut clattered across the bridge of boats over the Jumna, and roused the sepoy of the cantonments. The old king ordered the palace gates to be shut against them, but the guards soon joined them, murdered the English commander and the chaplain who happened to be staying with him in the palace, and forced the bewildered octogenarian to accept the nominal headship of the revolt. His leadership was never anything more; throughout he was

## THE MUTINY IN DELHI

treated with great disrespect by the soldiery, and his age and antecedents made it impossible for him to lead effectively however much he may have wished it. Then came the rapid extermination of the Europeans in Daryaganj, and the imprisonment of the surviving women and children in the Fort, where they later met a violent end for refusing to abjure Christianity. A number of others were sheltered by Indian families in the city at great personal risk.

Then followed in rapid succession the defection of the Indian troops as they were brought up from cantonments to the guard house of Kashmir Gate, the attack on the Magazine (near the General Post Office), the blowing up of it by its gallant defenders, and the flight of the English residents from the cantonments. Throughout that May day the English women and children were collected in the Flagstaff Tower at the end of the Ridge, awaiting the troops from Meerut who were standing idle the while, until at nightfall the whole body of survivors fled in disorderly rout across country towards Ambala.

It is not within the scope of this essay to



## DELHI

describe in detail the military operations before Delhi,<sup>1</sup> and it will therefore be sufficient to say that the returning army from Ambala under Sir Harry Bernard arrived at the Ridge on 8 June after a number of battles, that the first attempts to take the city by assault were unsuccessful, that the army had perforce to await for two months the arrival of the heavy siege train from Lahore, and meanwhile suffered greatly from heat, sickness and mutineer attacks, and that on 11 September began the final bombardment of the north side of the city which presaged its assault and capture in the week 14–20 September 1857.

The British line on the Ridge ran from the neighbourhood of the present Mutiny Memorial to Flagstaff Tower with Hindu Rao's house, now the Hindu Rao Hospital, as its strongest point. Its flanks were protected by posts near Metcalfe House on the left, and on the mounds of the present golf course on the right. The camp lay behind the

<sup>1</sup> The most readable account of these operations is to be found in H. C. Fanshawe's *Delhi, Past and Present*, ch. iii, pp. 75–221 (London, 1922).

## THE MUTINY IN DELHI

Ridge on the old Viceregal estate. The sites of the batteries engaged in the final bombardment are still marked by stone platforms with inscriptions, and the walls are preserved just as they were left after the fighting.

Within the city disorder, scarcity and misery reigned during these months of siege and battle.<sup>1</sup> The rebel troops had no recognized leader, and Mirza Mogul, the Mogul Commander-in-Chief, was quite unfit to control them. Eventually Mohammed Bakh-tawar Khan, a havildar of the Bareilly force became the actual commander. He was energetic and brave, but never established a strict discipline or control of the troops. The soldiers, as in former days, were in chronic want of pay, and roamed the streets of Delhi threatening and plundering. Supplies fell short, and the Hindu citizens in particular, not daring to stir out for fear of the troops and unable to purchase grain because of the high prices, suffered much privation. Periodically the bankers of Delhi were summoned to the palace, and ordered to provide a

<sup>1</sup> See *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, ed. C. T. Metcalfe (Constable, London, 1898).



## DELHI

loan for the government. Their reluctance to advance money to so precarious an authority was overcome by threats, but their protests grew steadily louder, and the sums forthcoming steadily smaller. The police arrangements had broken down, criminals of all sorts were hardly checked and could always cover themselves by posing as soldiers. Nor was there any way of escape open. On one side lay the British army, each man of which regarded himself in something of the light of an avenging angel and was quite unlikely to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, a peace-loving Hindu bania from a fugitive Mussulman horseman. On the other hand the roads were threatened by the Gujar villagers, who seized the opportunity to plunder and loot every undefended building or unguarded traveller. To them was owing the plunder of Metcalfe House with its treasures, and of Sir Thomas Metcalfe's curious country villa, half tomb and half bungalow, near the Qutb Minor at Mahrauli.

The assault of Delhi ushered in a week of horror for the city. After the capture of Kashmir Gate, fighting continued for a week

## THE MUTINY IN DELHI

in the tangled lanes and alleys of the city, and for a time the British were driven back by the sepoys who had deliberately left casks of beer in the streets. Drink, desperate resistance of the sepoys and the goad of heat intensified the ferocity of an already ruthless battle, and for the non-combatants, most of them wishing for nothing but peace, the week was one of unrelieved horror. At the end of that time control over the troops was restored and some sort of security re-established.

British authority within the city was established by 20 September. Mohammed Bakh-tawar Khan fled into the open country, and there remained only the aged Bahadur Shah, who had taken refuge in Humayun's tomb with a disorderly rabble of retainers and fugitives. Bahadur Shah surrendered to Hodson on 21 September on the promise of his life, and was lodged near the Delhi Gate, and the next day three of his sons surrendered on the same conditions, but were shot near the present jail for fear of an attempt to rescue them. Then began the punitive period, which was hardly less terrible for the city than the siege and the sack which had



## DELHI

gone before. Summary trials took place and were followed by daily executions before the Kotwali (police station) in Chandni Chowk, the very centre of Nadir Shah's massacre. In all 3,000 were tried and 1,000 executed by the military courts. In addition all the Moham-medan inhabitants were expelled from the city. The crown of the proceedings was the trial of Bahadur Shah in the Diwan-i-Khas in the Fort before a military court. The old man, hardly able to understand what was going on, was duly found guilty and transported to Rangoon, where his grave may still be seen, and where some of his descendants still live.

After the people, came the city. The maze of bazaars and streets which covered the area west of Lothian Road as far as the Jama Masjid and the present Roman Catholic Church, one of the most populous areas of the city, was demolished in order to give the guns of the fort an unrestricted line of fire. Some mosques were demolished and others confiscated, including the great Jama Masjid itself. The mosque of Daryaganj was used by troops until the visit of Lord Curzon, and the marks of their kitchen fires can still

## THE MUTINY IN DELHI

be seen, and the Jama Masjid was only restored some years later when there was a threat of its purchase and demolition by a Hindu merchant. Finally Delhi lost its separate administration and became a part of the new Panjab province. So ended the dynasty of Timur and so ended Mogul Delhi.

As the year 1858 wore on the city gradually resumed something of its old appearance. The civil authority was restored and trade began again; but the city was but a shadow of its former self. All that gave it a special character and a dignity among the cities of India, all that linked it with an imperial past, had been violently wrenched away, leaving only the empty shell of monuments and ruins, and the reality of a depressed and hopeless provincial town. Many of the best families migrated to Hyderabad, the others who had recently been discussing the possibilities of the new learning from the west, retired within themselves to dream about the past. The pageantry of Delhi was gone, and there was left only the musings of old men. For a generation Delhi was a city in spirit laid desolate, without energy and without hope.



## IX

### MODERN DELHI

FOR many years after the Mutiny the slow process of healing at the hand of Time proceeded. The restoration of the Jama Masjid to the Mohammedan community may be described as the symbol of this process, and as its completion the restoration of a number of mosques and monuments by Lord Curzon in 1903. But in addition to this healing process, another development was taking place, which restored Delhi to importance in spite of the intentions of statesmen, and laid the foundation of its present prosperity. Once more the natural advantages of the city's position prevailed against the blows of men. For with the development of railways in the latter part of the century it soon appeared that Delhi was the natural junction for the routes from east, south, south-west and north-west. Delhi became a railway junction, and as the Panjab increased in prosperity, its

## MODERN DELHI

significance increased in proportion. Once more it became the distributing centre between the Panjab on the north-west on the one hand and the rest of India on the other. Enterprise and hope returned, the population increased steadily, and by 1900 it had reached 200,000.

Thus at the opening of the twentieth century Delhi was once more a thriving and forward-looking city. The Delhi Durbar of 1903 seemed to set the seal on this new life, though as yet no one looked forward to anything more than expanding commerce and increasing wealth. It was therefore a surprise for the city almost as great as that of the Mutiny when at the Delhi Durbar of 1911 the King-Emperor announced the transference of the imperial capital to Delhi. Once more the wheel of fortune had come full circle, and Delhi, the most severely treated city in 1857, became the seat of the supreme government in 1912. In fact, once the desirability of removing headquarters from Calcutta was admitted, the overwhelming historic claims of Delhi gave it a preference over all other claimants to the position.



## DELHI

The rest of the story is one of rapid growth and expansion. Temporary buildings were erected in the old Civil Lines north of the city in 1912, and the Viceroy was lodged in a building beyond the Ridge, where the besieging English army had once encamped. The new capital, planned by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker, though delayed at first by the war, rapidly rose on a site to the south-west of the old city in the years immediately after it. It was formally opened in 1930, though it had been largely in occupation for some years before that time. The new city already holds 80,000 people more than it was originally planned to receive. Its original plan is substantially complete, but it continues to expand rapidly, as new demands are met and new needs spring up.

The architecture of the city has many striking features. The first is its lay-out and planned vistas, which happily relate some of the great monuments of the past, like the Purana Qila and the Jama Masjid, to the work of the present. The most striking of these is the great avenue of Kingsway which

## MODERN DELHI

leads from the Viceroy's House through the Memorial Arch to the Purana Qila. Next comes the complex of Government buildings which form the centre of the city — the Viceroy's House, the two blocks of the Secretariat and the Council House. By far the most striking of these and one worthy to take rank with the great buildings of the past, is the Viceroy's House, the work of Sir Edwin Lutyens. It combines a simplicity of outline and severity of form with a richness of detailed work, and classic proportions with skill in execution which will make it perhaps the most memorable monument of the British in India. Third come the public buildings such as the Church of the Redemption, the Roman Catholic Church, the Government *serai* in Mogul style, and the palaces of the great princes, and lastly the numerous private mansions which by their variety of form and style add an interest which is absent from the stereotyped bungalows of the officials. The style of the city as a whole is frankly classical, and where Indian features are added they are incidental and not fundamental. Roughly speaking it may be said that only



## DELHI

Sir Edwin Lutyens has succeeded in blending harmoniously the details of Indian craftsmanship with this general essential form of the classic.

Within the new city there is growing up a remarkably diverse society, official in the main of course, but containing an increasing proportion of other elements. Indian and English officials freely intermingle in friendly intercourse, and the presence of foreign consular offices and the International Labour Office, adds a cosmopolitan touch. Every January the Princes assembling for the Chamber Meeting add glitter and bustle to the scene and insecurity to the roads. The Assembly Session from January to April brings men of all communities from all parts of India. It becomes truer every year to say that all roads lead to Delhi. Delhi is no longer in the words of the proverb 'still afar off', and one has only to wait patiently therein to see in succession every person of importance in the country. Finally many all-India commercial and other organizations, realizing the importance of Delhi as the future centre of the country, are establishing

## MODERN DELHI

offices there, and some even transferring thither their main headquarters.

At the same time the old city has expanded in line with the new. It is one of the most congested cities in the country, its population has almost doubled in the last 20 years and now stands at about 350,000 (1931). Socially the most significant feature has been the influx of the Panjabi and the Sikh. The city is filled with new energy, enterprise and ambition; by degrees it is learning to think imperially once more. The immediate problems are to co-ordinate the administration of the three areas of New Delhi, the City, and the old Civil Lines so as to regulate equitably the expansion of all three, and control efficiently such subjects as sanitation, public health, transport and town planning.

So we reach the end of the long vista of Delhi's history, and stand gazing once more into the mists of futurity. Though not yet so populous or so brilliant as in the days of the Moguls or the Tughlaks, Delhi is undoubtedly more powerful, more significant in the national life, and more firmly established as the capital than ever before. There is no



## DELHI

danger of the Viceroy quitting Delhi for Agra in pique as Shah Jahan left Agra for Delhi, or Mohammed Tughlak left Delhi for Daulatabad. For the importance of Delhi is founded on more than the presence of a court or an army; it rests upon its great public buildings which cannot be lightly abandoned, its easy communication with all parts of the country, its geographical position which all historical experience has confirmed, and finally upon the accumulated sentiment of seven centuries, and the mounting aspirations of the new nationalism. Delhi is the natural centre of the new Indian Dominion, as Calcutta was of the old British Empire.

# INDEX

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p> <b>AHMAD SHAH ABDALI</b>, 72, 73<br/> <b>AIN-UL-MULK</b>, 24<br/> <b>AKBAR</b>, 47, 48<br/> <b>ALA-AD-DIN</b>, 16, 18<br/> <b>Alai Darwaza</b>, 18<br/> <b>ALTAMSH</b>, 15<br/> <b>Anandpur</b>, 9, 10<br/> <b>ANANG PAL</b>, 10<br/> <b>Asoka pillars</b>, 30-2<br/> <b>AURANGZEB</b>, 50, 51-9<br/><br/> <b>BABUR</b>, 42, 45<br/> <b>BAHADUR SHAH I</b>, 60; <b>II</b>, 82, 85, 86, 91, 92<br/> <b>BAHLOL LODHI</b>, 41<br/> <b>BAJI RAO</b>, 69<br/> <b>BAKER, SIR HERBERT</b>, 96<br/> <b>BERNARD, SIR HARRY</b>, 88<br/> <b>BERNIER, FRANÇOIS</b>, 50, 51-9<br/> <b>Bijay Mandal</b>, 25<br/><br/> <b>Calcutta Gate</b>, 73<br/> <b>CHANDRAGUPTA II</b>, 9<br/> <b>Chausath Khamba</b>, 34<br/> <b>Chor Minar</b>, 17, 38<br/> <b>City walls, the</b>, 77-8<br/> <b>Council House, the</b>, 97<br/><br/> <b>Daryaganj, mosque of</b>, 92         </p> | <p> <b>Delhi</b>: central situation of 2-3; change of site of, 4-5; College, 84; exodus from, 23, 24; Gate, 81, 91; <b>IBN BATUTA</b> on, 26-9; in xix century, 80-1; <b>New Delhi</b>, 96-100 seven cities of, 1; <b>TIMUR</b> in, 34, 36-7; under <b>AKBAR</b>, 48; under <b>SHAH JAHAN</b>, 48-9<br/> <b>Diwan-i-Khas</b>, 72, 77, 92<br/><br/> <b>FIROZ SHAH</b>, 29-33; <b>Kotla</b> 33; <i>Madrasa</i> 35; restorations of, 32-3<br/> <b>Firozabad</b>, 33-4<br/> <b>Fort, the</b>, 44, 80<br/><br/> <b>GHIYAS-AD-DIN TUGHLAK</b>, 19, 20, 21<br/> <b>Gwalior pottery works</b>, 32<br/><br/> <b>Hall of a Thousand Pillars</b>, 18, 25, 32<br/> <b>Hauz Khas</b>, 18, 26, 35, 36, 37<br/> <b>HINDU RAO</b>, 80, 88<br/> <b>Hindu Rao Hospital</b>, 31 34, 88<br/> <b>HUMAYUN</b>, 45         </p> |
|---|--|



## DELHI

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>IBRAHIM LODHI, 42<br/> IMAD-UL-MULK, 71, 72<br/> Indraprastha, 7, 45<br/> Iron Pillar, the, 9<br/> Irwin Hospital, 34</p> <p>JAHANGIR, 48<br/> Jahanpannah, 25, 35<br/> Jama Masjid, 44</p> <p>Kalan Masjid, 34, 35<br/> Kashmir Gate, 6, 80, 83, 87, 90<br/> Khirki Masjid, 35<br/> Khuni Darwaza, 45n., 70<br/> Kingsway, 96<br/> Kuru War, the, 8</p> <p>Lady Willingdon Park, 41<br/> Lal Kot, 10<br/> Lodhi style, 39<br/> Lodhi tombs, 41<br/> Lothian Road, 50<br/> LUTYENS, SIR EDWIN, 96-8</p> <p>Magazine, the, 87<br/> <i>Mahabharata</i>, 6, 7, 8n.<br/> MAHMUD OF GHAZNI, 10<br/> MAHMUD TUGHLAK, 38<br/> Marathas, the, occupy Delhi, 72, 75-7<br/> Metcalf House, 36, 80, 88, 90<br/> MOHAMMED OF GHOR, 11, 12, 13<br/> MOHAMMED TUGHLAK, 21-6, 29</p> | <p>Moth-ki-Masjid, 42<br/> Mutiny Memorial, 88</p> <p>NADIR SHAH, 70-1<br/> NASIR-AD-DIN MAHMUD SHAH, 15<br/> NILICHATRI, 8n.<br/> NIZAM-AD-DIN, 21<br/> NIZAM-UL-MULK, 63</p> <p>OCHTERLONEY, SIR DAVID, 77</p> <p>Pandavas, the, 7, 8<br/> Pathan style, the, 39-40<br/> Pats, the five, 7-8<br/> Peacock Throne, the, 70-1<br/> Police Station, 70<br/> Post Office, 87<br/> PRITHVI RAJ, 10, 11<br/> Purana Qila, the, 7, 8, 40, 45, 46</p> <p>QUTB-AD-DIN AIBEK, 13, 15<br/> Qutb, the, 10, 13-14, 15<br/> Qutb Mosque, the, 14<br/> Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, 14, 15</p> <p>RAZIYA, QUEEN, 15<br/> Ridge, the, 34, 35, 80, 83, 87</p> <p>SAFDAR JUNG, 42, 71, 72, 73n.<br/> Salimgarh, 46, 50<br/> Secretariat, the, 97</p> |
|--|---|

## DELHI

SHAH ALAM, 73, 74, 75, 78	TAVERNIER, J-B., 71n.
SHAH JAHAN, 48-50	Tughlakabad, 20-3
Shahjahanabad, 49, 72, 77	Tughlak style, 19
Shalimar Gardens, 50, 80	Turkoman Gate, 16n.
Sher Mandal, 46	
SHER SHAH, 46	Viceroy's House, 97
Sher Shah's Mosque, 40, 46	
Shoe-sellers' Riot, the, 64-8	War Memorial Arch, 8, 97
SIKANDAR LODHI, 42	Western Jumna Canal, 30
Siri, 18	Willingdon Air Port, 37
Suraj Kund, 9	

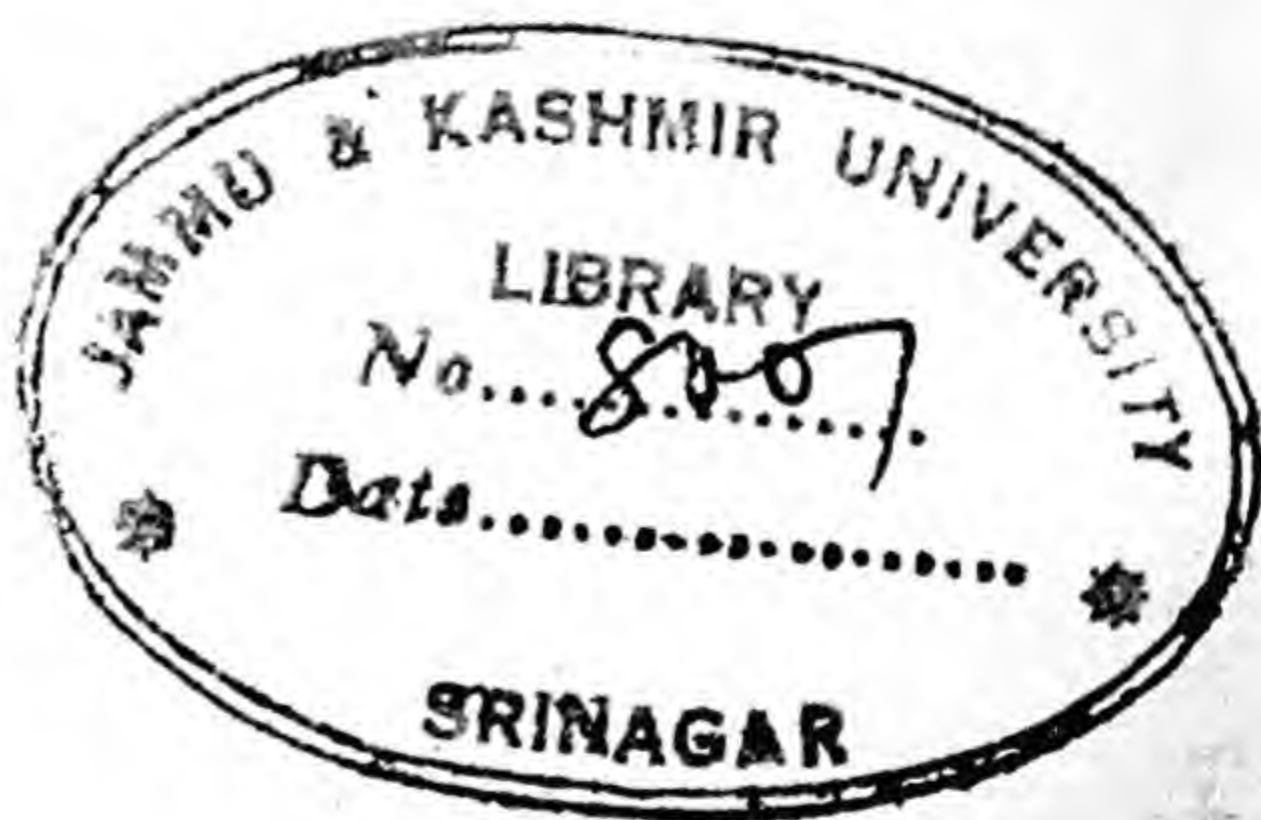




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